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LONDON FIGHTS THE ALTON BILL!

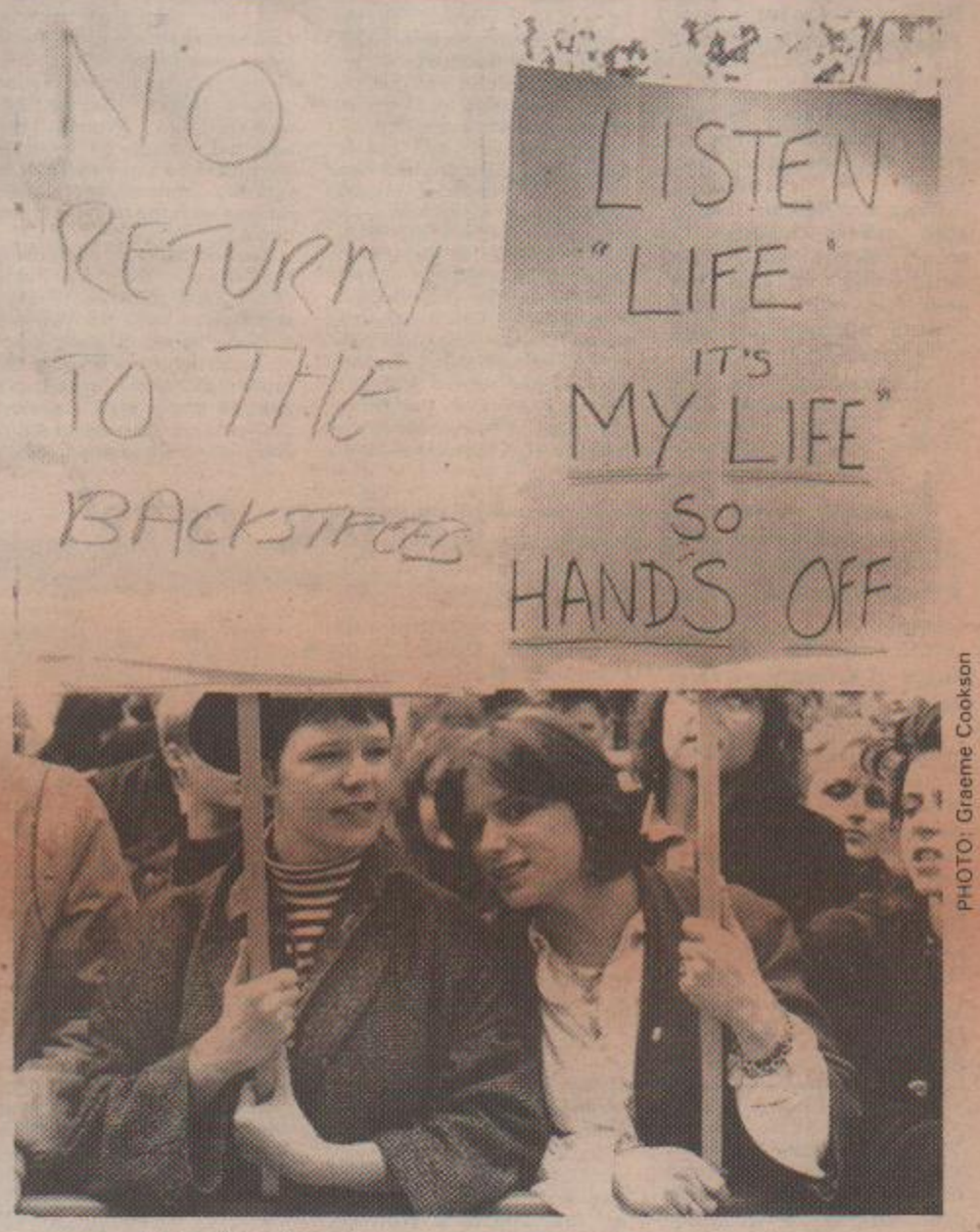


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Picket outside the LIFE rally, Central Hall, London, 27.10.87

David Alton's Bill — designed to impose a time limit of 18 weeks for abortions — is seen by anti-abortion campaigners as the first step in repealing the 1967 Act which legalised abortion.

Since its first reading, FAB (Fight the Alton Bill) groups have been set up all over London.

There are groups now operating in Watford, Greenwich, Croydon, Brent, Lambeth and Islington. New FAB groups are being organised in Newham, Tower Hamlets, West London, Hillingdon, Haringey, Camden and Hackney.

In colleges, FAB groups and opposition to Alton are building up. The University of London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) is producing posters for FAB. South Bank Poly, the London College of Printing, and LSE have FAB groups. The Polytechnic of North London (PNL) has passed a motion supporting FAB and the issue is being discussed in many other Student Unions.

London unions are also beginning to organise. Clerical workers in British Telecom were amongst the first to give support to the campaign. The issue is being raised amongst postal, rail and local government workers. Camden NUT officially supported a FAB picket of local Tory MP Sir Geoffrey Finsberg's surgery. NALGO nationally and the TUC Women's Equality Committee have taken stands against Alton.

By JILL ENTWHISTLE
Women's Officer, Holborn & St Pancras CLP

Many Labour Party branches, GCs, and Women's Sections have passed motions and circulated petitions against the Bill. This activity must be maintained and pressure must be put upon Labour MPs to vote against the Bill, particularly in light of the NEC's 1987 statement which concedes the "right of conscience" on abortion matters to individual MPs.

Anti-Alton campaigners in London have held public meetings and street meetings. In some cases they have been able to link up with local anti-cuts campaigns. Health service cuts in Brent, for example, mean that there are now *no NHS abortion facilities* for women in the area — a connection needs to be drawn between the issues and the separate campaigns brought together.

The next reading of Alton's Bill is on January 22nd. Leading up to this, on January 16th, there will be regional FAB demonstrations and activity all over the country. On January 21st there will be *a mass lobby of MPs* as well as a rally in Central Hall, Westminster, and *a torchlight vigil*. If the second reading is passed, a national demonstration is planned for March 19th.

Mobilising against the Alton Bill must be a priority for the labour movement at all levels.

What You Can Do

★ Circulate the national FAB petition.
★ Pass resolutions in trade union branches, CLPs, women's organisations, Trades Councils, Student Unions, etc., against the Bill and in support of the mass lobby on January 21st. Donations to FAB are also needed.
★ Join your local FAB group — or set one up in your area. Details from National FAB. Also send in details of your local activity.

FAB, c/o NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU
Phone: 01 490 0042/405 4801

Hackney FAB launch meeting:
November 24th, Town Hall, Mare Street
Speakers: Diane Abbott, Pauline Alden (NALGO), Rosie Newbigging (Hackney Health Emergency), David Sloane (Doctors for a Woman's Choice on Abortion) and FAB speaker.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Local government round-up

Camden

Cuts update

Hundreds of Camden workers took part in a 24-hour strike against the cuts on Thursday October 29th.

NALGO reported that over 75% of their members had refused to cross picket lines and many sections of the Town Hall were entirely closed down.

By Steven Taylor
Hampstead & Highgate CLP

The leadership of the Council had done their utmost to undermine the strike — distributing leaflets and newsletters to staff calling on them to cross picket lines and threatening to use the police if more than six pickets appeared at any workplace entrance.

The rally, held in the early afternoon, was attended by several hundred strikers, addressed by members of NALGO's executive, and received messages of solidarity from UCATT, sections of NUPE and the Labour Councillors opposed to the cuts policy.

The cuts are now affecting virtually every area of Council services, with the vacancy freeze bringing staffing levels in some departments down by over 50%.

Care centres, libraries, nurseries, and play areas have been either closed or reduced to a partial service as the number of workers is reduced. The Council leadership's consultation exercise had collapsed as opposition to their cuts programme has increased.

The number of Labour Councillors opposing the cuts has now increased to eleven, with Graham Good and Dave Horan — respectively Chair and Vice Chair of the Leisure Services Committee — joining Kate Allen, Steve Bevington, Angela Birtill, Gloria Lazenby, Karen Newbury, Sandra Plummer, Caroline Holding, Graham Shurety and Adrian States. It seems likely that the Group will attempt to remove these additional Councillors from their positions at the next Group meeting.

Within the local Labour Parties, repeated calls for the leadership to state their "bottom line" and the demand that they begin to adopt a policy of resistance have been met with a wall of silence. The fact is that the leadership of the Group, now totally dependent on the hard right, are prepared to carry out any Tory policies that are necessary in order to retain authority.

As the hard right, led by Councillors Hulme and Smyth, gain asendancy within the Group, the leadership faction around Dykes, Hughes, Fitzgerald and Woods has adopted housing policies which are patently racist, and virtually criminalised workers dealing with the homelessness crisis.

The left Councillors, calling themselves the Manifesto Group, will continue to align themselves with the workers and the working class communities who are bearing the brunt of the leadership's policies and a march against the cuts is planned through Camden on November 28th.

Action over 'caring cuts'

A day of action by Camden NALGO resulted in a virtual shutdown of Council services across the borough.

The one-day strike on October 29th was very well supported despite unprecedented attempts by management whose tactics included quoting Tory anti-union laws to deter staff from taking official strike action.

By Fran Mason
Deputy NALGO steward
Homeless Persons Section

At least 75% of all NALGO members stayed away from work and the success of the strike demonstrated the solidarity of workers in the face of vicious attacks by management and Councillors on the workforce and the community.

Since Camden embarked on a course of "caring cuts", heavy-handed management techniques and a persistent refusal by management and Councillors to consult with the unions or the local community has resu ted in various disputes across the borough.

The mental handicap residential section has been on strike since October 2nd, because of the suspension of a member of staff who was upholding selective industrial action as part of a longstanding dispute.

Libraries and Arts have taken strike action over the suspension of four workers who were supporting NALGO branch policy of no cover for vacant posts.

Staff at the homeless persons section have been locked out of their workplace since October 9th and Camden is providing virtually no service to the homeless.

Staff from the Central Estates Management section are on an all-out strike because of the failure of management and Councillors to honour their assurances that a temporary post would be made permanent.

NUPE workers in the Boiler section also came out on strike over a dispute on travelling expenses with management.

A packed lunchtime rally on the day of the strike heard speakers from other London boroughs also fighting drastic cuts in jobs and services. Labour Briefing supporter Councillor Graham Shurety, who opposed the 20% cuts package Camden's ruling Labour Group has in store for the workforce and the local community over the next year, addressed the rally in support of the strike and proposed demonstration and rally for Saturday December 5th to highlight opposition to the Council's current strategy.

Hackney

More cuts emerge

On October 27th, 200 angry Hackney DLO workers lobbied the Housing Services Committee meeting to protest about a cut in the Council's housing redecoration programme which they believed would threaten their jobs.

The cut had not been put to the recent Labour Party Borough Confernece which had agreed a redeployment strategy, asset sales, and a £3 a week rent rise.

But it was one of the many extra cuts now emerging in Hackney which have not been endorsed by the Party.

By Peter Chowney
Hackney Councillors Against the Cuts

Those which came to light at the Housing Committee include:

- a complete halt to the internal redecoration programme;
- an overtime ban on estate cleaning resulting in a much reduced service;
- a halt to the use of private contractors for all but "life and limb" repairs, but with these repairs left undone rather than handed over to the DLO;
- a ban on all non-contractual overtime, resulting in the cutting of tenant consultation meetings, housing Area Forums, and the virtual abolition of the housing Mobile Patrol Service.

Since the 15 Labour Councillors who voted against cuts and rent rises are in a majority on the Housing Committee, the first three of these cuts proposals were voted down and the DLO workers jobs were protected. But the officer overtime ban remains, having been agreed by a central Budget Sub-Committee.

This left Housing Committee members powerless to overturn it, or even to make any protest about the effect it will have on service delivery.

The use of central, non-service committees to convert leadership edicts and cuts proposals into instant policy is becoming increasingly common. This centralisation of the cuts process without reference to service committees, let alone the Party, is already causing much concern amongst Party members, including those who supported rent increases and redeployment.

The redeployment agreement is now running into stiff union opposition, with no guarantees that staff grading and wage levels will be protected. As the effects of the cuts package — already agreed "in principle" — filter through, and as more under-the-table cuts are parcelled out, Party unity around the Council leadership begins to look increasingly shaky.

HACKNEY FIGHTBACK!

No rent rise, no cuts in jobs and services!

Speakers:
Martha Osamor, former deputy leader Haringey Council; Jenny Rogers, Hackney Community Sector ACTSS; Laurence Hemming, Council Trade Union Broad Left; Cllr. Felicity Harvest; Rose Dunn, Hackney Council DLO Worker; Tenants Representative

17th November, 7.30pm
Hackney Town Hall

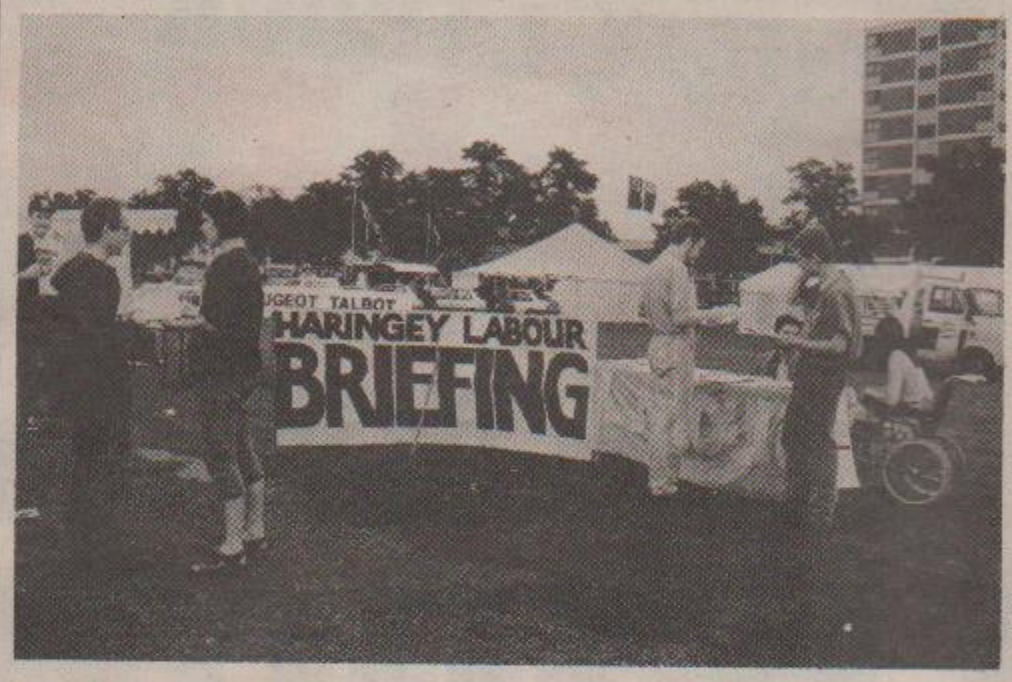


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Haringey Labour Briefing supporters in action: running an information stall at a local festival

Haringey

How we built the fightback in Haringey

Haringey Fights Back! is now meeting weekly and is regularly attended by trade union activists, Labour Party members, Council tenants, and community group representatives.

Leaflets aimed at manual workers and Council tenants are being produced.

By Mike Marqusee and Mandy Mudd
Haringey Fights Back!

Lobbying of councillors, public demonstrations, and direct action against the cuts are being planned.

Hostility to Haringey Council's £15 million cuts package — topped up with radical surgery to the capital programme and another £20 million worth of additional cuts next year — is growing, as is active and organised resistance to it.

Twelve Labour Councillors voted in full Council against the cuts and another two abstained. Local NALGO and NUT branches are opposing the cuts, as is the local Trades Council, the Broadwater Farm Youth Association, and at least seven local Labour Party branches.

The background to the fightback in Haringey — and the reason for its relative strength — is the political struggle which has been waged in the Borough around a number of critical issues for several years, including rate-capping, the Broadwater Farm uprising, and lesbian and gay rights.

Through these conflicts links were forged and political consciousness raised. A strong *Briefing* group was built across the Borough. This group was able to raise fundamental questions about the Council's financial crisis at an earlier stage than elsewhere, and was thus in a strong position to defend the Party's longstanding commitment to no cuts in jobs or services when the crunch came, shortly after the general election defeat.

The District Auditor had queried aspects of the Council's creative accounting and the budget looked in danger of being deemed "illegal". The new Council leader Steve King put the options clearly before the Party — cave in and cut, or stand firm and defy the government — and *Briefing* supporters recognised that the time of decision was at hand. Either we won the Party to a position of conscious and organised resistance or we started down the slippery slope to total compliance with the Tories.

The inner-Party debate that followed was bitter. *Briefing* supporters organised at every level to win support for the no cuts position, but we always saw clearly that the real contest would take place outside the Party.

We decided to go public and launch a broad-based anti-cuts campaign. We needed to dissociate ourselves from the right wing Labour cutters and to build the alliance between Council workers, tenants, and service-users which offered the only real alternative to becoming the Tories' hatchet-wielders in Haringey.

Over the summer, we produced a leaflet explaining the political background and implications of the proposed cuts and circulated it, along with an anti-cuts petition, throughout the Borough. Our presence at public events, local festivals, outside Council workplaces and tube stations, coupled with an ambitious flyposting offensive, made us an unavoidable presence in Haringey — and drove the right wing to distraction!

A succession of hard-hitting press releases, exploiting well-known Councillors' names and unashamedly alerting local residents to the scale of job losses and service cuts awaiting them, and a press conference with anti-cuts councillors, gained us local media attention.

The official launch meeting of *Haringey Fights Back!*, held on September 14th, was attended by over 200 local people — by no means exclusively the familiar activist faces.

The launch meeting agreed a statement of purpose and a simple constitution and delegate structure for the campaign. The only real dissent was from a member of the Communist Party, who felt the Council had no choice but to comply with the District Auditor and that we should campaign only against the Tories.

Within the week, the no-cuts position was overturned in the Labour Group, the Council leadership was booted out, and the cuts were passed in full Council. Haringey Fights Back!, meanwhile, had mobilised over 600 angry people to protest outside the Civic Centre.

We presented our petition inside the Council chamber (to cheers from a packed gallery), and continued the arduous work of building a mass fightback with little official labour movement support and in the face of a spate of witch-hunting attacks by right wing Party members and friendly journalists.

NALGO and NUT called a Day of Action against the Cuts and asked Haringey Fights Back! to co-ordinate the public demonstration. One Social Services Area Team is now on indefinite strike over the victimisation of a worker who refused — in line with NALGO national policy — to cover for a frozen vacant post.

Voluntary groups are regularly lobbying Committee and Labour Group meetings. Haringey Fights Back! is busy providing support and publicity and linking one front of the fightback with another.

We are working with London Fights Back and building support for the planned London-wide day of action in the New Year.

A number of Labour Party branches and sections are handing out HFB! material and even organising meetings against the cuts, much to the chagrin of the new Council leadership and local Party officers. At the moment we can claim to be no more than a substantial but active minority of the local CLPs. But unlike the right wing, we are conducting our campaign in the workplaces, the estates, and the community groups — and our support out there is mounting steadily.

We still lack sufficient official labour movement support, not to mention finance, and are dependent on a high level of commitment by a handful of individuals. But already we have created in Haringey the basis for a long-term anti-cuts campaign, and most importantly, helped give people the confidence to organise themselves to defend the jobs and services on which they rely.

Haringey Fights Back!

meets every Tuesday at 7.30 at Brabant Road Trade Union Centre, Wood Green

GLLP Special Conference

For a socialist 'Plan to Win'

The Greater London Labour Party is holding a special one-day conference on Sunday December 13th at the Elephant and Castle Leisure Centre to discuss the future strategy of Labour in London.

By Joan Twelves
GLLP Regional Executive
(personal capacity)

The GLLP AGM in July showed the two strands of thought about the recent General Election defeat — the left and the right/LCC. The report before the Special Conference epitomises one of those strands.

It considers the reasons for our defeat were demographic change, poor organisation and an image of division (in other words the "loony left"). Everyone is blamed — except the authors of the report.

It concentrates on local government solely in the context of the need for Labour Groups to make cuts to stay in power. Its proposed solutions? One campaign and a reduction in the size of the Regional Executive from 58 to 41, by reducing all sections proportionately — CLPs and Trade Unions from 16 to 12 each, women from 8 to 6, etc.

Having failed to achieve a right wing majority on the REC this year (even after changing the way CLP reps are elected), and with the AGM defeating a resolution to remove the right of the Women's Conference to elect its own reps directly, the right is trying again to remove the left and leave the trade union bureaucrats and regional staff in control.

All Labour's problems in London are reduced to demography and image. The report fails even to mention good results, that Party membership is growing in some areas, or positive campaigning. Nowhere does it recognise the failures of the national campaign, particularly the lack of clear policy on economic and fiscal matters.

This is indicative of the general level of defeatism in the GLLP leadership. Also missing is any real understanding of the unique sensitivity of London, as the capital city, to national and international events and policies, or of its multi-racial and multi-cultural events.

We shouldn't underestimate the problem. But to produce the kind of political analysis needed to work out the concrete tasks facing the GLLP, we need a balance sheet of the last few years, so that we can learn from what we've done right, wrong or indifferently. This is missing.

Support for Labour in London reached a high point during the Save the GLC and ratecapping campaigns in 1984/5 and has steadily declined since. Between May 1986 and June 1987 it plummeted.

In trying to explain this decline, the report omits any mention of the key struggles of those years: the miners' strike, Wapping, Broadwater Farm, rate-capping, fights against privatisation in the nationalised industries and Tory boroughs, the teachers' dispute.

The destruction of London's industrial base and health service is ignored, as is the alienation of large sections of the community to the political process. No real anger is demonstrated about the acute manifestations of extreme poverty and extreme wealth sitting cheek by jowl in the same city.

These omissions are less surprising when you look at the role of the GLLP during these years:

- the GLC and ratecapping campaigns were led by the GLC and the boroughs — the GLLP's role was minimal;
- during the miners' strike, the only solidarity events organised in the name of the London Labour Party were those organised by the London Women's Committee in the face of weakly-concealed cynicism and hostility;
- during Wapping, resolutions to organise grassroots support and solidarity action were defeated at the instigation of the REC representatives from the printers' own unions!
- more recently, the GLLP refused to circulate the leaflet advertising the Broadwater Farm-sponsored March for Civil Rights and Justice on the grounds that it was "provocative".

The report correctly identifies one of the roles of the REC as being to co-ordinate campaigns. Major camapigns on health and policing were set up for last year — well before the election. They never happened.

The REC's Campaign Committee was shut down during the Fulham and Greenwich by-elections, and during the General Election. Instead, a "special" committee was set up to run London's campaign from Walworth Road, comprising precisely those who are most keen to find scapegoats now for our defeat.

The only time the Campaign Committee managed to assert its role was in the May 1986 borough and ILEA elections, when we did well. The age-old cry for regional staff to campaign instead of policing CLPs is even less likely to become a reality now that they will have to spend all their time supervising OMOV parliamentary selection.

The report correctly identifies some of the major attacks we can expect form the government against Local Authorities. The inner cities will be a key battleground and the GLLP must play a leading role in stopping the break-up of the ILEA; but these have to be located in an overall strategy clearly based on defending the interests of all sections of the working class against Tory attacks.

It is not good enough for the GLLP to reduce its strategy to managing services, staying in power, only raising equal opportunities issues if they are electorally popular, and reorganising the REC.

Explicit and concrete support has to be given to all those in struggle, whether it be against trade union legislation, privatisation, cuts in local services, immigration and nationality laws, benefit cuts, nuclear issues, attacks on civil liberties, lesbians', gays' and women's rights (immediately, this means the Alton Bill), rent increases, or closures and job losses.

Labour will only win elections in London if it is clearly seen to be on the side of the people. We need an alternative strategy, based on support for those in struggle. **The left on the REC is organising a Conference in December to formulate such an alternative strategy in advance of the GLLP Conference.**

Briefing supporters need to be making sure that resolutions are submitted to the Conference making it clear that the strategy of the London Labour Party must be:

- firmly rooted in supporting all struggles against the government;
- rejecting the report *A Plan to Win*;
- calling on the REC to prepare a detailed strategy and programme of action based on this principle for consideration by the AGM in March;
- and rejecting any proposal to change the current constitution of the REC at the present time.

GLLP Annual Conference

Model resolution

Resolution 1: Employment Discrimination

This Conference expresses great concern at the continuing employment discrimination suffered by the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. The overall unemployment rate of Catholic males has remained two and a half times that of Protestant males and that of Catholic women one and a half times that of Protestant women. Catholic males are under-represented in skilled occupations and over-represented in low status, low paid jobs.

This annual meeting expresses its opposition to religious and sexual discrimination in the North of Ireland.

Resolution 2: Banning from electoral office

This annual meeting reaffirms the basic principle of democracy that it is for the electors to decide who they wish to represent them.

Annual meeting notes that where the Conservative government has been unable to win the political argument and the vote it has resorted to measures like the abolition of the GLC, the disqualification of councillors from office and the massive erosion of the powers of local government.

In the north of Ireland, alongside other abuses of civil liberties, the government is now proposing to impose an oath as a condition of candidature in local government and assembly elections. Where the oath is deemed to have been broken councillors would be disqualified and also face the threat of imprisonment or fines.

This annual meeting totally rejects these government proposals as a serious attack on the democratic right of the electors, not the government, to decide who they wish to represent them.

The regional executive is instructed to respond along these lines to the Northern Ireland Office on this matter and to inform the NEC of this policy.

Make sure Ireland is debated! London Region LCI

Kingston

Tories get down to work

The Tories have regained control of Kingston Council just 17 months after their defeat in the May 1986 London Borough Council Election.

By John Hayball
Chessington South BLP

Their second by-election gain from the ruling Alliance Group in the North Kingston Tudor Ward prompted the parade of the victorious candidate to the adulation of the final day of the Tory Party Conference in Blackpool.

A small Labour Party-led demonstration lobbied the Council meeting on Tuesday October 20th where the Tories' first action back in office was to change the Council's standing orders to remove the ex-officio right of the Leader of the tiny four-member Labour Group to a seat on every Committee.

The Guildhall demonstration also included:

- a contingent of Labour women particularly prominent in campaigning for creche facilities for Kingston shoppers and for the Women's Committee — which the Tories also moved quickly to abolish;
- a sizeable section of student union members from Kingston Further Education College where a shortage is affecting some 500 young people — a campaign which the labour movement should actively support.

As a result of the change in administration the balance of representation on London-wide bodies is threatened.

This makes the wresting of power from the Tories in Wandsworth at the Southfields by-electon all the more urgent to redress the Kingston situation.

Theatre

Full house for the Long March

Several hundred people packed Brixton Town Hall on Sunday November 1st to watch The Long March, a play performed and directed by striking BTR Sarmcol workers from South Africa.

This performance was the last in the strikers' tour of Britain, publicising their struggle and seeking support.

By Gary Ostrolenk

The play follows the history of the Sarmcol dispute, from BTR's original refusal to recognise MAWU, the workers' union, which prompted the strike. It shows strikers organising a boycott of local white shops, touring the local area to rally support for a one-day regional general strike, and constructing barricades covered in shit to repel the police.

The strikers' wives see off the bailiffs who tried to repossess their furniture. After they are sacked, the strikers form their own T-shirt printing co-op for the South African labour movement, and vow to continue their struggle, the Long March, for reinstatement and for socialism.

The play emphasises Britain's role in South Africa. BTR is a British company, and it is the BTR director in London who makes the decision to sack all the strikers. He is also shown scolding Thatcher for her political fudges on South Africa.

As he angrily reminds her, "politics is economics — I didn't make you Prime Minister so you could put me out of business."

The performance at Brixton was organised through Lambeth Trades Council. As a bonus, the strikers preceded the play with a gumboot dance (dexterous and boisterous welly-slapping dance routines) and there was an enjoyable social afterwards to mark the end of the tour at which the Trades Council donated £400 to the strike.

Lambeth Council provided the hall free of charge.

The play is fast, funny and passionate. If you missed it, watch out for the video.

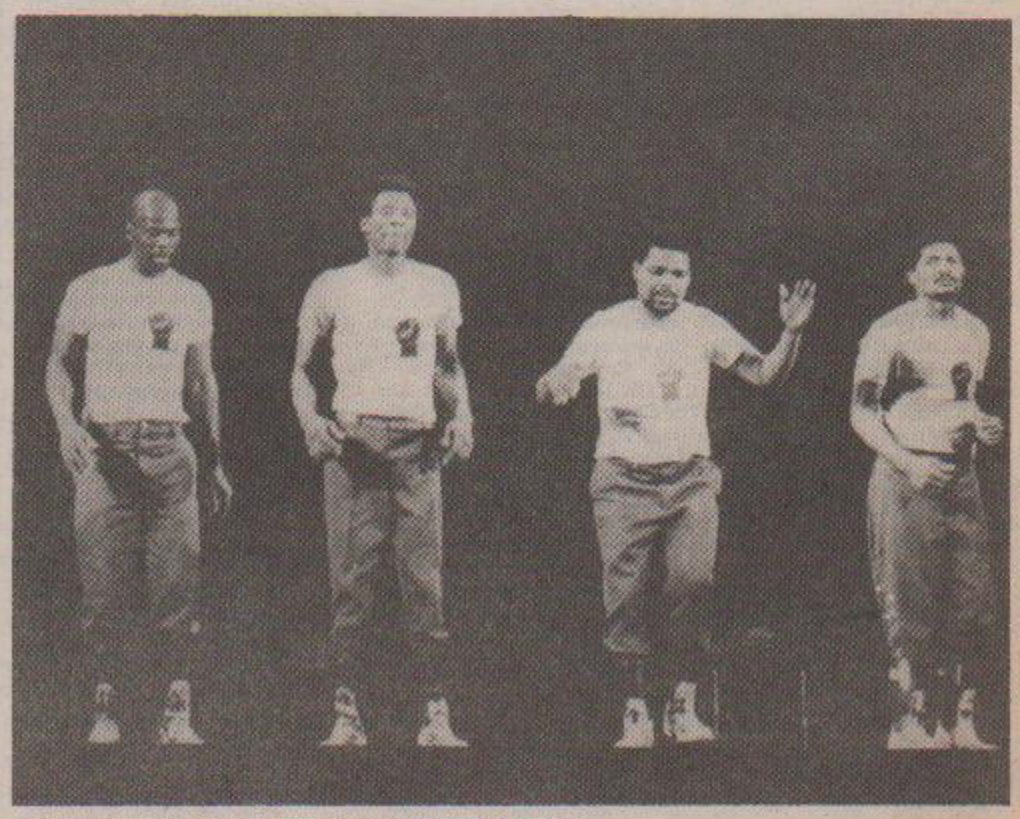


PHOTO: Ingrid Gavshon

Scene from The Long March in performance in Brixton

Health

Campaign of anger

The North Kensington and Paddington District Health Authorty at its October meeting slashed £400,000 off this year's budget.

It also halted £1.7 million worth of scheduled work, using compulsory redundancies and attacking community based care — in particular child care provision and surgery for the elderly.

This is bad enough. But at the December DHA meeting, proposals will be considered for the closure of three out of five hospitals, the removal of accident and emergency facilities from another and the drastic reduction of our acute services.

The Dean of the Medical School said at the October DHA meeting that he "would go to the barricades to defend acute services" (just before he voted for the round of cuts).

This is not too impressive — but it is a sign that medical opinion is running high. We will certainly make common cause with anyone to defend the health service and if consultants are ready to go to the barricades, it is up to Labour to build those barricades and drive our faint-hearted allies behind them!

By Paul Harrington Kensington CLP

Tower Hamlets DHA's defiance is a start. If a large teaching distrct such as ours joins the resistance, then the political stakes will be upped decisively.

Kensington Labour Party General Committee took the view that a Campaign of Anger must be launched, to involve the unions, the community, the users, and anyone prepared to work and fight for the reversal of government policy.

The Labour Party will be at the forefront of this campaign and will be serving the community — to use a Kinnock phrase! — not by reviewing policy, but by fighting for the services needed by our community.

Police beat up Trevor Monverville



PHOTO: David Hoffman

John and Annette Monerville; Hackney, 1st November 1987

Drop the charges now!

On Sunday November 1st, Trevor Monerville, his brother, Peter Thomas, and a friend, Paul Rolle, were arrested by Hackney Police.

The two brothers were beaten up by police officers before being charged with attempted robbery, grievous bodily harm and assaulting a police officer. It is not unusual for the police to charge a person with assaulting a police officer as an excuse for the police beating them up.

This whole incident has more to do with Trevor Monverville's campaign for justice after his detention by police in January resulted in a brain operation, than with the police fighting crime. The police have realised the Trevor Monverville Campaign is not going to die down. At some stage the police are going to have to give a proper account of what happened to Trevor in Stoke Newington police station in January.

The arrest of the three men and the police portrayal of Trevor as a dangerous criminal is all part of the process of criminalising black people. The police are criminalising Trevor and tring to discredit the Monerville family in an attempt to prejudice public opinion against the Family and Friends of Trevor Monerville Campaign. We will not let this happen.

● STOP PRESS: On Thursday November 12th, at 7.30pm, senior police officers will be attending a meeting at the Roots Pool Community Centre in Montague Road, London E8, to discuss what happened to Trevor in January. We ask that as many people as possible attend that meeting.

Education

Stop 'Loopy Levitt's' schools grab!

The first shots have been fired in the battle to decide the future of education in Kensington & Chelsea, with the publication of the government's so-called Consultation Document.

Both Tories and Labour have called general meetings of their school governors; governing bodies have debated the proposals and a round of parents' meetings have been held, on the initiative of Labour activists.

What do people think of the government's plans so far?

The opening round has clearly gone to us. A packed and enthusiastic meeting of Labour governors listened to Steve Cowan for ILEA, Martin Francis for the West London Teachers Association, Richard Hawkins for Kensington Labour Party and Neil Kearney for the Labour Group, explain the implications of the Tory take-over plan and the struggle ahead to defeat it.

By contrast, at the Tory governors meeting, Labour speakers intervened to expose the sham of parental choice offered by the "Opt Out Plan".

The Chair of the Tory steering committee for the take-over, Bryan "Loopy" Levitt, could only repeat at three minute intervals that he "could give no guarantees" as to the future of Nurseries in North Kensington, provision for special educational needs, charges for "Extras" like school trips or music, the prices of school dinners, class sizes and so on.

When an angry parent demanded to know if the borough would press ahead with opting out of ILEA even if parents, teachers and governors were united in opposition, it was clear that the embarrassing answer was "yes".

By Dave Holland Kensington CLP

Tory governors of several schools, such as Avondal Park, have voted for Labour motions against the "Opt Out". The wife of Kensington Tory MP, Lady Caroline Rhys Williams, abstained on Holland Park governing body.

It has been the same story at hastily convened parents' meetings. At Holland Park, out of a meeting of 150, five parents voted to support the Borough's take over. At the primary schools in the North, like Bevington, parents have responded warmly to Labour plans for a campaign to defeat the proposed dismemberment of ILEA.

We have got favourable local press coverage and the ground has been prepared for the massive display of parental disapproval that will be needed to defeat the Tories in the two year struggle that lies ahead.

The construction of an umbrella group "Defend Education in Kensington & Chelsea" is the next task. But a number of problems await us.

The ILEA Labour Group, with which we have often sharply disagreed, and its leadership have resigned the field without a struggle, welcoming the proposed "national curriculum". We will clearly want to reserve the right to criticise ILEA where it is undermining the basis for a united defence of a unitary authority.

As for the leadership's willingness to dump all the gains of progressive education, this is a deep-seated political problem, which cannot be wished away by denunciation. Ken Jones was right in the last issue of *Briefing* to call for the content of education to be put on the political agenda. But how?

This is as much a problem for the "industrial unionism" approach of the NUT (or the ILTA) as it is for the Labour Party leadership. There should be further discussion in *Briefing* on this need for a programmatic struggle for radical education.

A further problem is the urge from the right to, as the Leader of the Kensington & Chelsea Labour Group put it, "make sure the Party keeps a low profile." This is to woo the widest coalition of wet Tories, churchmen, etc., into opposition.

It is an idea that the left must clearly resist. It is the parents we must mobilise; the Labour Party itself must be a magnet for all those who want to defend education.

Another problem is the temptation to go for direct funding for at least the larger schools, to "Opt out of the opt out". At this stage, this would be deeply divisive and derail any possibility of a mass campaign to defend the unitary authority.

Kensington & Chelsea would be one of the smallest education authorities in the country. It would clearly not be able to provide the kind of strategically planned support services that ILEA can. Our nurseries, already decimated by Health Authority cuts, would probably close.

Education would get worse. Bryan Levitt has already explained that parents can only feel properly involved in their children's education if they contribute towards it financially!

It will be our responsibility over the next two years to hammer home the arguments and make sure that the political price for doing this will be too high. Hopefully, Wandsworth will go Labour on November 19th and the whole scheme of carving up ILEA will be thrown into deep difficulty.

Jets set for Docklands

A mini-Gatwick will be placed in the heart of Newham's Docklands if latest moves to expand London City Airport get the go ahead.

Long before the ink was dry on legal agreements limiting noise and airport expansion to propeller-drive, 50-seater, Short Take Off and Landing (STOL) Dash-7s, the airline industry and the developers were lobbying hard to bring in jets.

As early as February (the airport opened in November), glossy brochures and slick videos arguing the case for the British Aerospace (BAe) 146, had already been prepared.

The airport developers, Mowlems, are giants in the property world. They are the developers behind the £400 million Docklands Light Railway and have massive investments in countries as far away as China.

Never content, Mowlems know that use of the Dash-7 alone will not bring in vast profits. The BAe 146 has twice the seating capacity, more than twice the range, and is much cheaper to operate. And crucially, owners Boeing are shutting down the Dash-7 line.

Thus, the much-vaunted "good neighbour STOLport" looks very much as if it was a stalking horse for a larger airport scheme, just as objectors at the Public Inquiry predicted.

Mowlems have been pressing Nicholas Ridley to change the design of the proposed new Thames bridge linking Newham and Greenwich. Unless the huge towers are lowered, jets will not be able to get in.

Once over this hurdle, Mowlems will submit plans to the London Docklands Development Corporation to extend the runway and alter planning controls on noise so as to allow in jet aircraft.

By John Turkie Hackney North CLP

Clearly, Mowlems and BAe were aware that if expansion plans had been announced at the Public Inquiry stage, the Inquiry Inspector might well have come out against the STOLport altogether.

One way or another, Ridley will ensure the developers are not hindered. The airport has no future unless local people are neutralised and squeezed out, a crucial element in the "redevelopment" of Docklands. It is only by having the flexibility to expand and respond to the market that the airport can be really profitable in the long term.

Already, the runway borders on back gardens and is overlooked by a school, and major terminal buildings push hard up against Council flats in Silvertown. Mowlems have put in a bid to buy the school from Newham Council in order to build a hotel, and have already acquired more land on the south side of King George V Docks for "airport operations" including a parallel taxiway which will significantly increase the airport's capacity.

Throughout recent events — which lay bare an elaborate deception by property developers and government. — the LDDC has maintained a public attitude of "we're on the side of the community". In February 1987, the LDDC's newspaper carried a front page headline: "Jets Ban at City Airport". John Mills, the LDDC vice chair (former deputy leader of Camden Council and still a Labour Party member), was quoted as saying, "Thes proposals would be turned down flat by us."

Never one to let his politics interfere with his work, John Mills is bowing to pressure and changing the LDDC tune. In a letter to a local community group in September 24th 1987, he says:

"We have given no commitment that jets will be allowed to use the airport in the future, but it is clearly premature to rule out the possibility of this ever happening."