LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING
40p FORTNIGHTLY
No 90 MARCH 9 ~ 22 1988

Councillors Against the Cuts

THE ONLY ANSWER TO LONDON'S CRISIS RESISTANCE!

"London has the highest poverty levels in the country. Homelessness increases daily. Our health service is crumbling. Firefighters jobs are being cut. Not satisfied with closing the GLC, the Tories are now going for ILEA and are forcing local Councils to make swingeing cuts in jobs and services."

That was the first and grim part of the message delivered by an array of London Labour Councillors at a press conference held at Conway Hall on March 3rd. The second and more positive part of the message was that "Labour Councils should stop doing the Tories' dirty work and *start to fight back*."

By MIKE MARQUSEE
Haringey Labour Briefing



Successful lobby against Southwark Council's threat to close nurseries in Bermondsey

Buoyed by resistance to NHS cuts, left Councillors from Brent, Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark and elsewhere called on "the whole labour movement to go on the offensive to demand the money to meet the needs of Londoners".

In voting against cuts in jobs and services, even in defiance of local Labour Whips, the Councillors were only expressing a groundswell of outrage in the communities they represent.

Councillors told of the mounting absurdities and dangers facing Labour Councils making ever-deeper cuts in an attempt to cling to the illusory "power of local political office". Many have been forced to closet themselves away from an angry public, using security forces and police to keep the working class at a safe distance. Many now find themselves facing legal actions initiated by their own trade unions.

Ironically, some of those Councils keenest to stay on the friendly side of the law are now failing to meet their statutory obligations because of the cuts. Of the three hundred children registered in Haringey as potentially vulnerable to abuse, over one hundred have not been allocated a social worker. Whe aken to court by the local NALGO Branch, instead of pointing an accusing finger at the government, the right wing Chair of Social Services sought simply to deny the crisis.

"Rather than launching attacks on those prepared to fight, Council leaders should resign if they are not prepared to stand by their Manifestoes," said the Councillors Against the Cuts, who were present in force on London's March 8th Day of Action.

"We will work with all those prepared to fight against cuts in jobs and services," they promised, "whoever makes them."

In contrast to the inertia of the Greater London Labour Party (illustrated in its dismally unproductive Annual Conference at the beginning of March), the stand taken by Councillors Against the Cuts symbolises the possibility of a dynamic labour movement response to London's profound crisis.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Camden round-up

DHSS take action

Strike spreads as staff resist cuts

On December 21st last year, staff at Camden A Unemployment Benefit Offic walked out on indefinite strike over management's decision that the office was "overstaffed" and that five staff would be compulsorily transferred to Jobshops. A further five staff were expected to be moved in January.

By Chris Moran
DHSS London North
CPSA Deputy Secretary
(personal capacity)

This was opposed by the staff, who felt that as there was a backlog of work, no reduction in staffing should be made.

Compulsory transfers of staff also represented a fundamental change in the working conditions of "non-mobile" civil servants. Therefore, the strikers demanded no staff reductions and only voluntary transfers.

At jobcentres, casual staff were sacked by management, who felt that they could be replaced by transferred staff from UBOs.

At a fairly early stage in the strike, the local DHSS offices were approached and asked not to do scab work and to refuse to make payments in the place of those offices out on strike.

After three weeks of this, management issued threats of suspension at four DHSS offices, which have since walked out.

The strike has now spread to some 20 jobcentres and UBOs, and to five DHSS Offices, with more expected to join the strike.

A motion was carried at a meeting of strikers which called for further offices to be pulled out and a campaign mounted for all London Offices to take indefinite strike action. However, John McCreadie and his supporters on the NEC appear to prefer gestures such as one-day strikes in the Department of Employment to all out stoppages.

The government clearly sees this as a trial of strength with the unions. It intends to push through staff cuts and privatisation throughout the DE and DHSS.

The decision to threaten staff in the DHSS was taken at Ministerial level. Also, the alacrity with which Emergency Payment centres were set up and the taking on of an agency cashier at Euston Office shows a clear determination on the part of the goverment to fight this dispute out, as they clearly believe the political stakes are high.

Messages of support and donations to: CPSA, c/o 7, Fowler House, South Grove, London N15 5QJ, with cheques payable to CPSA Fighting Fund (marked NW London UBOs on back).

St Pancras

Library occupation against cuts

Fifty angry people occupied St Pancras Reference Library as it was about to close for the last time on February 20th — a victim of Camden's cuts.

The Reference Library is heavily used by students, particularly from the Third World, as well as by many unemployed people. Its facilities amount to the nearest thing to an Unemployed Center in the south of the Borough.

The occupiers were faced with a bullying and frightened management reaction. The Children's and Lending Libraries in the same building were closed to the public under Council Leader Dykes' orders.

By Dave Bangs
Kings's Cross LP

Occupiers were escorted to and from the toilets, and were locked in to the first floor. Most of the lights were turned off and management threatened them with personal liability for all expenses incurred.

Despite this the occupation won extensive media coverage, with scenes showing those inside hauling up supplies with a bucket and rope from supporters outside.

With the support of library staff, and despite management threats, several new people were smuggled in to reinforce the action.

Management finally evicted the occupiers after four days of fear that the action would escalate.

Despite the near unanimous support of over 60 library staff in the building, no complementary industrial action was forthcoming. Library management — in an almost strike free department — were able to intimidate with crude threats which veiled their own complete isolation.

Kings' Cross Labour Party members — Slasher Dykes' own word — played a prominent part in the occupation and helped to shift the whole focus of opposition to library closures greatly to the left, forcing the middle class PLUG (Public Library Users Group) to endorse a much clearer anti-cuts position at its mass meetings held whilst the occupation took place.

Reinstate the Camden eleven!

On 12.2.88 11 Labour Councillors were expelled from Camden Labour Group.

We were expelled because we believe that Camden Labour Council should abide by the Manifesto on which it was elected.

Since June 1987 Camden Labour Group have argued that we should stay in office and make cuts.

This has led to massive cuts of between 20% and 40% across Council services, and swingeing cuts in grants to the Voluntary Sector which have led to compulsory redundancies. The Council has adopted a racist policy towards homeless Irish people to cut the Bed and Breakfast bill.

They have adopted an industrial relations approach which Rupert Mudoch would be proud of. They have threatened to sack any NALGO member who refuses to sign a new contract of employment (which includes compulsory redeployment) rather than negotiate with the union.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Statement by Camden Manifesto Councillors

On top of this Camden Labour Group have put up Council rents by between £3.50 and £4.80 per week while at the same time reducing the number of repairs and slashing Estate Management. All of this has been done to balance the books.

For these reasons, we believe that Camden Council has abandoned any commitment to resist the further attacks on local government which the Tories are about to unleash. Instead of insisting that the Tories pay back the money they have stolen from the people of Camden in Rate Support Grant, and campaigning with those who wish to resist this Tory Government, the present Labour Council has decided to sacrifice the interests of its own working class communities to stay in office.

We do not accept that Camden Labour Councillors have the right to reject the central mandate on which we were elected. The manifesto Labour Councillors have consistently argued that the people of Camden and its workforce have the right to be consulted on such an important reversal of policy.

We believe that this is why we have been expelled from the Labour group. It is an attempt to silence any alternative argument about political strategy. We are being asked to abandon our socialist principles and any commitment to notions of accountability and democracy.

The only time there is any debate about these policy changes at full Council meetings is when they are raised by the Manifesto Councillors. Time after time the Labour Group have attempted to go straight to the vote without any debate at all.

We will not be silenced. We will continue, alongside other Labour Councillors in London and elsewhere, to pose an alternative political strategy — one of resistance.

The Manifesto Councillors have never argued for resignation or giving over control to the Tories. We are not prepared to advocate capitulation and surrender. We believe it is crucial to retain control on the basis of socialist principles, rather than implementing Tory policy.

We want to stay in office in order to fight Thatcherism and remain Labour Councillors for as long as we can contribute to that sturggle on the side of the class we seek to represent.

Our allegiance, as Labour Councillors and as socialists, is to those people on the sharp end of Thatcher's policies, whether they are imposed by a Labour or a Tory Council.

Since June 1987 the Manifesto Councilors have spoken at dozens of meetings across Camden.The comon component of these meetings has been the willingness of Camden's workforce and Camden's communities to resist Tory policy.

Campaigns have already been generated within the Voluntary Sector, within Black organisations, Lesbian and Gay groups, Women's Groups, Tenants Groups, Community organisations, and the trade unions.

We have argued that a political strategy is necessary in order to deal with this crisis, and to resist further Tory legislation aimed at destroying Local Government accountability and democracy. By giving in now Labour Councils are simply preparing the ground for the government to implement the selling off of Council estates, increasing Council rents and decontrolling rents in the private sector, privatisation of Council services, the removal of planning controls, the Poll Tax, the Education Bill and Clause 29 of the Local Government Act.

The magnitude of these Tory attacks must be recognised. We believe that Thatcher in her third term of office is determined to smash Labour-controlled Local Authorities as part of her attacks on the working class and oppressed of this country. The present policy of capitulation adopted by the local and national leadership of the Labour Party will cut away the ground for resistance to these Tory attacks.

The debate on these issues is crucial for the future of the Labour Party in London, and will be mirrored across the coutry once the new Tory legislation becomes law.

In attempting to gag us the Camden Labour Group is helping to prevent this crucial debate from taking place. Instead they have chosen to create a climate of witch-hunting. Expulsions from the Labour Party have already taken place and more are being proposed.

The decision to remove the whip from 11 Councillors in Camden does not have majority support in the Party locally. Hampstead and Highgate CLP voted against the withdraawl of the Whip an over half the branches in Holborn and St Pancras opposed it. We are therefore demanding speaking rights at all branches, both GCs and at the LGC.

We are appealing to the National Constitutional Committee of the Labour Party against the withdrawal of the whip. We call on all comrades who support accountability and democracy to insist that Camden Labour Group reinstate us immediately.

You can support us by passing the model resolution at your Labour Party ward, GC, LGC, trade union branch, etc. If you require any further information please contact The Secretary, Camden Labour Manifesto Councillors Defence Campaign, c/o 24 Godwin Court, London NW1 1NN.

Model Resolution

Please put this resolution to your trade union, Labour Party ward or section, GC, LGC and Group.

This ..... notes with grave concern the decision of Camden Labour Group to withdraw the Whip from eleven Labour Councillors. These Councillors have been expelled form their Labour Group in order to silence their opposition to cuts in jobs and services.

The eleven represent a strong current of opinion within the Labour Party and the trade union movement who are opposed to Labour-controlled Authorities carrying out Tory cuts and are instead attempting to build resistance to Tory attacks on working class communities in the inner cities and local democracy.

We call upon Camden Labour Group to immediately reinstate the eleven, recognising that they represent a legitimate position which is shared by many of us in the labour movement and should not be witch-hunted for representing this view. Instead, the labour movement should be holding widespread and well-informed debates with its members and communities on how best to fight present Tory attacks and the many which are to come on working class communities.

Please send copies to: Richard Sumray, Secretary Camden Labour Group, Members Room, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1; and also to the Regional Executive of the Greater London Labour Party, the National Constitutional Committee, and the Camden Labour Manifesto Councillors Defence Campaign.

F.A.B.

Camden FAB is planning a joint public meeting and Street Theatre with Kentish Town FAB to publicise the National Demo.

After the demo we shall be concentrating on writing to MPs who voted for or abstained on the Bill, especially Labour MPs.

We are also planning various fundraising events — and have been supporting all the London benefits like the March 6th "Women's Choice" concert.

We have leafletted events such as the London healthworkers Day of Action and the NHS demo with a leaflet explaining how NHS cuts cause late abortions.

We hired a minibus to the Stop the Clause demo in Manchester and distributed leaflets calling for no return to back street abortions.

Camden FAB mets Tuesdays at 7pm, Kingsway Princeton College, Sidmouth Street, WC1.

Lambeth Council

Panic measures lead to further cuts as local opposition grows



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

● Another recruitment freeze;

● Bringing forward the target date for slashing 1,000 jobs by six months to September.

These are just two of the latest panic measures pushed through Lambeth Council to close the remaining budget gap.

But service users and Council workers have been turning up in numbers to Committees to ensure that making cuts has not been an easy ride.

The Social Services Committee saw the closure of 21 Luncheon Clubs for the elderly and some nursery schemes. Meal charges are to rise by over 60%, playgroup charges by 40% — and nursery charges are to be quadrupled.

For those worried that this might conflict with their socialist principles, Chair Phyllis Dunipace had a reassuring answer: "The increase should not be a problem as if anyone cannot afford to pay their place can easily be filled from the waiting list."

Despite opposition from the left Councillors the proposals went through.

It was not quite so easy at the Housing Committee. Tenants' reps turned up in numbers at two "consultation" meetings to argue against plans to close 12 local housing offices. As they pointed out, this would mean serious problems for the elderly and infirm and those with young children just getting to the offices, let alone coping with the worsening service.

By Greg Tucker
Lambeth Councillor

Tenants do not want a return to the days of the distant office, door permanently locked and telephone unanswered. They want what they were promised, improved local offices, open at hours accessible to all, where they can report a repair without having to hunt for an unvandalised phone box.

How serious the "consultation" was could be seen when it finally came to a vote. Knowing that the tenant memebrs of the committee would have a majority if they all voted with the left (with the Tories opportunistically supporting their demands) the meeting was arranged so tht the vote on cuts was taken without an item to fill vacancies for two new tenants reps to the committee. So the cuts were agreed 8-7 with the two reps excluded.

Roughest ride for Leader Linda Bellos came at the Women's Committee. She stormed out after representatives of the black community denounced her for having "blood on her hands".

The stormiest meeting so far was undoubtedly the Amenity Services Committee. Seen as a soft touch, Amenities had been targetted for the highest cuts. Three libraries were to shut with restricted opening for the rest. The Recreation Centre was to close mornings and a number of Council playgrounds and playschemes were to close permanently.

The day of the committee started with a mass meeting of Amenity workers. Pledging opposition to the cuts, gardeners and librarians, arts organisers and arborists united in calls for all-out action across the Council to stop the cuts.

At the committee itself Council workers were joined by service users to pack out the committee room. They forced Chair Andrew Carnegie to let them address the meeting.

One after another Council and voluntary sector workers, library users and the users of Council playschemes — both children and their parents — came to the microphone to explain why cuts should not be made, how people of all ages would suffer, and how Labour politicians have a duty to protect the community not give in to the demands of the Tories.

One pensioner explained how library provision had been a major victory for the working class when he was a child; a child explained how closing his playground woud leave no choice but to play in the streets.

But despite these demands and despite the fact that none of the proposed cuts had ever been discussed by Labour Group — or even by the Labour members of the Committee — they were forced through, using the votes of the ex officio members against the wishes of the ordinary committee members.

To add insult to injury, at a Labour Group meeting three days later, a further cut in the Amenities gardening service was forced through. The gardening service is to be cut from 270 to 80 staff despite a clear mandate form the local Labour Party that the Leadership should resign rather than cut the service.

In their quest for a "legal balanced budget" the Labour Group has gone from panic measure to panic measure, all at the expense of the workforce and the community. To finish off the package they aim to make cuts of over 25% in the voluntary sector.

But despite the concern that these cuts will mean many redundancies, Labour Group has now decided to leave it to the Committee chairs which groups should be cut. All questions of collective responsibility and accountability have been abandoned.

As one of the Group leadership put it recently:

"We will tell you what we choose to tell you when we feel like it and we will vote how we choose."

Labour Group may have abandoned responsibility — but workers and the community are showing signs of taking the threats against them more seriously. The Labour Party remains committed against the cuts. The tasks now are to build on the signs of resistance that have appeared over the last few weeks.

● Stop Press: Guess which committee was recalled to meet on *Saturday* March 5th, at the time of the TUC Health March? Yes. Amenities was being asked to make more cuts — at the time they expect the least opposition.

Haringey teachers

Is this agreement a victory?

The recent agrement reached between Haringey Techers Association (HTA) and Haringey Council which has brought an end to official strike action is seen by some members as a union victory in terms of local employees' resistance to the effect of Council cuts.

Part of a motion passed at the general meeting of HTA read:

"The Association believes that the agreement will defend members against the impact of cuts and therefore endorses the agreement."

It is true that there has been an agreement on the avoidance of compulsory redundancies. But what sort of victory is it?

The battle was not entirely won. There will be limits on class sizes (27 for reception and mixed age classes, 30 for other primary classes, and 27 for classes in mixed secondary schools).

Various Haringey Council figureheads will find space in the media to make noises about how Haringey has always had the best teacher-pupil ratio in the country.

But working conditions for teachers will be worsened by the cuts as will the quality of education for Haringey's schoolchildren — many of whom are working class and from the ethnic minorities. There will be compulsory redeploymnet, even fewer supply teachers than at present, and bigger class sizes.

By Jackie Lugg
Hackney Labour Briefing

As with its members in Inner London, the NUT Action Committee has backed down at a crucial time, despite the signs that Haringey Council was feeling threatened by the strike action. The Action Committee put HTA in a compromising situation in November. They offered official backing for action against education cuts, including reaching an agreement over class size and cover, in return for HTA discontinuing unofficial action over Baker, by abandoning its no-cover action.

The tradeoff of one kind of action for another was reluctantly supported, by many of us who were keen to escalate action in order to oppose Local Authority cuts. In the face of Baker's legislation and LEA cuts, the NUT Action Committee has consistently proved itself unwilling to support its members.

The battle has not yet been won in Haringey. The recent concessions made by Haringey Council to HTA prove the potential strength of workers' bargaining power.

But what must not be lost sight of is that the agreement could have been better by further strike action. Expectations must not be lowered with such gains. The agreement anyway only involves a section of Haringey's workforce.

The impact of cuts on Haringey's local community is still devastating. The closure of Fairfax community centre means that disabled people are being shunted around the borough; the loss of children's playgroups means that some children who have deaf and dumb parents will not be able to mix with children who can hear and speak; less library facilities; less social service provision.

People at the receiving end of these cuts are the most vulnerable and they have no union. A genuine fightback requires that the unions work together, not only for their members but for all sections of the community.

Haringey Fights Back

On Thursday February 25th the right wing *Evening Standard* ran a front page special on how the "hard left" had been defeated by "moderates" and Mandy Mudd ousted as Chair of Tottenham CLP.

What is the real story that lies behind this?

Well, Mandy Mudd did lose the Chair of the CLP — by one vote — and, after Vince Gillespie also lost the Vice Chair position, the rest of the left slate withdrew.

After long discussions we had decided that if we couldn't gain two out of the first three officer positions we wouldn't contest the rest.

We stood on a clear political platform and our collective withdrawal prevented the right and centre from splitting the group on the grounds that some individuals on the slate were more personally acceptable than others.

This prevented genuine political differences being personalised.

So was it a defeat?

The answer is clearly no. In order to achieve their vote the Labour Co-ordinating Committee had to mobilise many people who are not seen from one AGM to another, whom they will not be able to mobilise throughout the year.

But, more importantly, the LCC had to seek delegate status from their trade unions, having in the main failed to be elected from their wards.

What this means is that their tiny majority on the GC at the AGM is unlikely to be repeated, and that the wards and rank and file members in the Party are now swinging away from them as their hypocrisy and posturing become more evident.

Morale on the left is high. We have the discipline to act as a united group and this will continue so that we can be confident that it is us who will determine policy and campaigning priorities for the constituency.

Instead of running the Party machinery we can act as an opposition on the GC. Time gained from not managing the Party structures can be used to initiate educational and campaign to help build our struggle for socialism from the base of the Party and turn the Party outwards.

A defence fund has been established to support anti-cuts comrades arrested at the December 10th Haringey Local Government Committee.

Four people go on trial on April 5th facing charges of disorderly conduct. One of them, Councillor Craig Brewin, also faces a charge of assaulting the police.

The arrests occurred when local police aided and abetted by local right wing Labour Party hacks, attacked anti-cuts protestors inside Haringey's Civic Centre.

All four have denied all the charges and will be vigorously contesting their case.

Needless to say, the legal defence will cost money — and despite our best intentions fines may well be imposed.

Two of those charged, Craig Brewin and Mike Marqusee, are prominent supporters of *Labour Briefing* (and regular contributors to its pages).

The two others, Carmen Curran and Cath Hassle, are building workers employed by Haringey Council's Public Works Service, and active members of the PW's Women Workers Group.

We need your help! Please send donations to Haringey Fights Back Defence Fund, c/o Peter Doble, 27 White Hart Lane, London N22, or call 01 888 3421 for more information.

Camden collaborators must be stopped!

Is there no limit to the collabortion of London Labour Leaders with the property market's plans for inner London?

Late last year, John Mills — the Vice Chair of the LDDC — wrote to the ALA asking:

"whether I can interest you in various new ways of both improving the social and physical conditions in your borough(s), and also of providing your Council(s) with substantial additional funds either in the form of capital or revenue... The sums involved can be large enough to make major inroads into the deficits which many boroughs in London are currently facing."

(Mills was sacked by the Department of Environment (DoE) last December after revelations concerning his criminal past came to light — see *LLB* no. 86.)

John Mills went on to outline his "qualifications" for making the approach:

"14 years as a (Labour) member of Camden Council... two years as Deputy Chairman of the LDDC... (which) is transforming the prospects for East London... To make available to Labour boroughs the expertise which has been built up in Docklands, so that it can be used by normal local authorities (sic), I and other people are establishing a new organisation..."

The "other people" include John Marlow, who was, until recently, the Director of Finance in Camden.

The letter was circulated to all Leaders, Chairs of Planning, and Chief Executives of ALA boroughs, at the request of ALA Planning Chair, Camden Councillor John Wakeham. The covering note described the letter as "an approach your borough might like to consider in the context of inner city regeneration".

There was no hesitation from Leaders in Camden to take up the offer. Mills' organisation is "to give advice to the Council" in the use of their only real power — planning control — to negotiate "planning gain" with the developers of the Kings' Cross/St Pancras site.

As reported in *LLB* no. 87, the 130-acre site is the largest development site in central London up for redevlopment, Once British Rail and the area's other landowners have chosen a developer, negotiations with Mills' organisation on behalf of Camden Council, will begin in earnest. (As planning authority, the Council have the power to turn the application down flat).

By John Turkie
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

The favourites to get the landowners' blessing, Rosehaugh Stanhope, are well known to Mills. As Vice Chair of the LDDC, Mills stitched up the "historic deal" between the LDDC and Newham Council over the redevelopment of the 750-acre Royal Docks area, involving at least three development consortia. Rosehaugh are redeveloping the Royal Albert Dock site.

Though a Camden leadership clique has been meeting with developers and landowners for about a year, there has not been a single report-back to the Labour Group, which is yet to discuss the redevelopment and its enormous implications. In addition to Leader Tony Dykes and top Officers, the tiny but powerful group includes Councillors Alan Woods, Julie Fitzgerald, Satnum Gill and John Wakeham.



● Finding a suitable scoundrel to replace Mills on the LDDC Board is proving difficult for the DoE (see *LLB* no. 86). As the only Labour member on the Board, Mills' role (and Lord Mellish's before him) was crucial. He provided the essential contact with the upper echelons of the Labour Party who then encouraged Labour Councils into co-operation with the LDDC. The DoE has been considering a whole host of ex-Labour MPs and Councillors. A serious approach was made to Alf Dubbs, who lost Battersea at the last election. After Dubbs put forward certain conditions for acceptance, the DoE decided not to offer him the post.

● Greenwich Council and British Gas have agreed to draw up a joint planning brief for a massive "new town" on the banks of the Thames. The 240-acre site, occupying most of the Blackwall peninsula, is the largest riverside site remaining in London. It used to be the largest gas works in Europe. Most of the plant has been demolished but facilities for natural gas remain. British Gas owns most of the land and the remainder is owned by the Council, which is also the planning authority. A single developer or consortium will be chosen soon. No doubt John Mills will hope to be taken on then as a consultant for the Council in its negotiations with the developers.

ELAINE MORGAN
(Author of *The Descent of Woman* and *The Aquatic Ape*)
will be speaking on
WOMEN'S EVOLUTION
at 30 Camden St, NW1
(back entrance, St Pancras Community Centre)
on
Tuesday March 29th
6.30pm
All welcome!

Housing

New racist charter exposed

On Friday March 4th over 100 community representatives and interested individuals attended a seminar at Hackney Town Hall on the racial implications of the government's proposed Housing Bill — likely to become law in July.

Anger was expressed at the lack of influence of ethnic minorities on housing policy at national and local levels. Hackney was criticised for the racist nature of its allocations policy, whereby working class blacks have been "dumped" on unpopular estates.

By JIM THAIN

The proposed legislation will affect *all* Council tenants, as rents will rocket, tenancies become less secure, and services deteriorate. Evictions will become easier and homelessness will inevitably rise.

The concept of Housing Action Trusts provoked particular outrage as these will not be subject to Section 71 of the Race Relations Act, whereby Local Authorities are obliged to promote equal opportunities.

As Sections 17 and 18 of the local government Bill will constrain Local Authority spending on race relations, such public sector support as exists for ethnic minorities wil be reduced. An increase in racial violence will inevitably follow.

Sadly Hackney's Directorate of Housing (which called the meeting) declined to offer a lead or even respond to the repeated calls for mass demonstrations and direct action against the government.

Greenwich

Benn attacks Leadership

Over 150 people attended an NHS Broad Left meeting in Greenwich where the Tories have already closed three hospitals since coming to power and have plans to close yet another. The dispute in the NHS has shown the ineffectiveness of the Labour Leadership, where only four members of the NEC supported the action on February 3rd compared with 60% of Tory voters.

By Dave Lee
Woolwich LP

Tony Benn openly attacked the Leadership for taking a defensive position in relation to the NHS. He called on the leadership to demand elected Local Health Authorities, an increase in preventative medicine, reallocation of money currently spent on defence and the requisitioning of private health clinics to reduce the waiting lists, irrespective of whether people have paid for private health insurance or not.

Benn spoke on the need to unify the current wave of disputes into a single political struggle against the Tories. The NHS dispute is a political struggle to defend the gains of working people in the post-war period and should therefore receive the total support of the whole labour movement.

Tony Benn, however, remained silent on whether or not he would run for the Party leadership, despite calls for him to stand as the best way to unify the wave of disputes.

The platform also included two NHS stewards and a local Councillor opposed to the cuts being undertaken by Greenwich Council. Many NHS stewards spoke of the need to broaden the support and to link up with local Council workers to build a broad left in Greenwich.