LONDON LABOUR
BRIEFING
40p FORTNIGHTLY
No 94 MAY 11~24 1988

Middlsex Poly Occupation

STUDENTS TAKE ACTION!

By students occupying Middlesex Polytechnic

On Tuesday April 26th, at a meeting of Middlesex Polytechnic Students in North London, a decision was made to occupy the All Saints site of the Poly.

Hundreds of students backed the decision and the occupation has continued since then, despite court actions and other threats.

The occupation came in response to the proposed Tory cuts instigated by Dr. R. Rickett, the Polytechnic director, in particular the planned closure of the All Saints site and the transfer of the humanities and social science faculties.

Students are demanding:

- **No cuts in educational provision**
- **No closure of the academic programme at All Saints**
- **Full consultation with Middlesex Polytechnic Student Union on planning proposals**
- **No privatisation of education**
- **No victimisation of students.**

The Poly has openly and repeatedly stated that the transfer is happening because of external pressures and cutbacks; it is an attempt to make the Poly look like a good financial proposition in readiness for "vesting day" when the GERBIL becomes law. There are no clear academic or financial grounds for the closure of the All Saints site. The Assistant Director of Finance, Prof. Bob Perks, has resigned over the lack of proper planning.

The truth of the matter is that this move is totally politically motivated and in line with the government's attitude to education in general, which is geared towards commercial enterprise, i.e. industrial and business orientated courses in line with the proposed corporate status (Middlesex Poly plc.) objectives of the Tories.

Despite the despair of many, perpetuated by an apathetic Student Executive Committee, the feeling amongst students is still strong and confident, and has been given collective organisation.

Inspired by our actions, North London Polytechnic, Central London Polytechnic, and Paddington Further Education College have also gone into occupation. We've had messages of support from over 35 colleges nationwide. We have also had the support of the local Labour Parties and of 16 MPs, including Tony Benn.

A summons was served on twelve individuals (mostly officers of the Students Union) on Thursday May 5th. They have since appeared in court where some failed to stand firm and actually disowned the occupations (which have spread to the Enfield and Trent Park sites of the Poly). Though we know the court will eventually send the police down to the occupations to try to enforce Tory policy, the strength and unity of the occupying students, and our determination to fight the cuts, remains intact.

Like the miners, the P&O strikers, and the healthworkers we believe the only way to defeat Tory policy is to take a direct stand against it. We ask all trade unions and student unions to support our actions.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Focus on

Principle begins to pay off

The last six months have seen turbulent times in Haringey, but the left finishes this period in a stonger position than we could have hoped for at Christmas.

True, £46m cuts have gone through. But agreeing the cuts in abstract is one thing; implementing them is another, as resistance grows in the community and the Party to the Council Leadership's strategy.

This Leadership is a mixture of LCC and ex-Communist Party fellow travellers, together with the soft right. They receive further support within the Labour Group from a rump of the old right and the soft left.

The only issue that truly unites these individuals is that of legality at all costs.

Council Leader Toby Harris's strategy of hanging on to "power" at all costs is beginning to wear thin. The coalition built within the Group on the basis of a fear of surcharge is beginning to founder as political and personal differences emerge.

By Cllr Peter Doble
Haringey

The right's inability to complete its strategy is largely due to continued public opposition to cuts and to the fact that the 12-16 Councillors Against Cuts have stuck together and continue to form a solid voting block against the Leadership.

The Party, too, is beginning to fight back. After a short period when both CLPs — Tottenham and Hornsey & Wood Green — were controlled by LCC hacks, Tottenham GC now has an effective left majority, as shown by a number of recent votes.

In Hornsey & Wood Green, the LCC are stronger and have built on a more established base of older rightwingers. However, there are indications even here that the same people are worried about the wider effects on the Party should the LCC Young Turks, through their manipulation of meetings and their wilful cynicism, succeed in alienating a large and active part of the left from the Labour Party itself.

Rapprochement

There is now a move for rapprochement being led by the soft left on the Labour Group. They reject the left's opposition to cuts, but they also reject the determination of the right to witch-hunt us.

Since September, there have been at least four attempts to discipline the left, resulting in the left being removed from all committee chairs, but not from membership of the committees themselves.

This was not enough for Toby Harris and his clique, who cannot be sure of getting their own way unless they remove a number of left Councillors from the Group.

A plot was therefore hatched between them and the LGC EC — firmly in LCC hands — to remove six left Councillors who had moved or seconded, albeit unsuccessfuly, various anti-cuts motions at the March 7th Council meeting.

Emergency

Without prior warning the LGC on March 20th passed an emergency motion to suspend the six (Craig Brewin, Peter Doble, Vince Gillespie, Kevin Hargreaves, Steve King, Narendra Makanji) from the Group for three months unless we signed a statement to abide by the Group Standing Orders.

This motion came to a joint LGC EC/Group meeting on April 28th, and at last the soft left, after months of pusillanimity, joined with us to defeat the witch-hunters.

In its place, a motion was passed setting up a panel of Councillors and Party officers to sort out, in effect, how the two wings of the Group can be reconciled.

The centre, of course, remain confident that a "middle way" can be found — one which would enable them to stay within the law but without having to put up with the arrogance and hectoring of the current Leadership.

In the long term this poses questions for the left. Do we accept the olive branch or reject it as naive apolitical sentimentalism, make no concessions, and push the Party into an almost inevitable split at local level?

Failure

In the short term, the failure of the Leadership to remove us from the Group means we were still there at the Group AGM on May 5th. The left put up an anti-cuts slate — which did not win, but which demonstrated once agin that we enjoy the solid support of a substantial minority of the local Party.

Of course, the real struggle, as ever, is outside the Council Chamber and the Group — and here too the cuts strategy is running into problems.

Haringey Fights Back! continues to meet regularly, and though it has not succeeded in uniting the disparate anti-cuts campaigns as effectively as it would have liked, these individual campaigns are vigorous and getting results.

The most notable of these was a campaign opposing the amalgamation of the 46 Infant and Junior schools into 23 Primary schools with subsequent reductions in teacher numbers.

Tremendous opposition from parents, teachers, and Party members was mobilised at a speed and to a depth which belied all those people who argued so adamantly that it was impossible to build mass popular support to defend the public sector.

The Council leadership cannot stomach any opposition; popular demonstrations against them (there were hundreds of people at both Education Committees whch discussed the amalgamations) cannot happen of their own accord — by definition! They must have been whipped up by the far left!

Nonetheless the mass opposition forced the right to climb down and reduce the number of schools to be merged.

Stormy

At the Education Committee on April 22nd seven schools were still threatened, but after a stormy three hour meeting this was defeated with four Labour Councillors (Kevin Hargreaves, Peter Chalk, Davina Cooper, Nicky Gavron) taking the lead with the co-optees in opposing the mergers. In the end, the stunned pro-merger Labour Councillors abstained — thus themselves breaking Group policy!

The left have also mobilised well to maintain the Council's commitment to defend lesbian and gay rights and oppose the implementation of Clause 28.

At the Special Council meeting on April 25th, called by far right Tory Councillor Peter Murphy, a motion was passed pledging continued support for the lesbian and gay unit, *Reading Matters* bookshop, and our election pledges to defend lesbian and gay rights.

But this motion had to be fought for in the Labour Group. The Leadership's strategy was just to make a statement and not even put forward a concrete motion. And the statement was written in the bureaucratic cotton-wool of the ALA (whence it originated).

Defiant

We were told we had to agree this because of the legal ramifications if we adopted a more defiant position. Fortunately, these scare tactics failed and the Group adopted a motion incorporating support for the statement, but with a stronger line defying Clause 28.

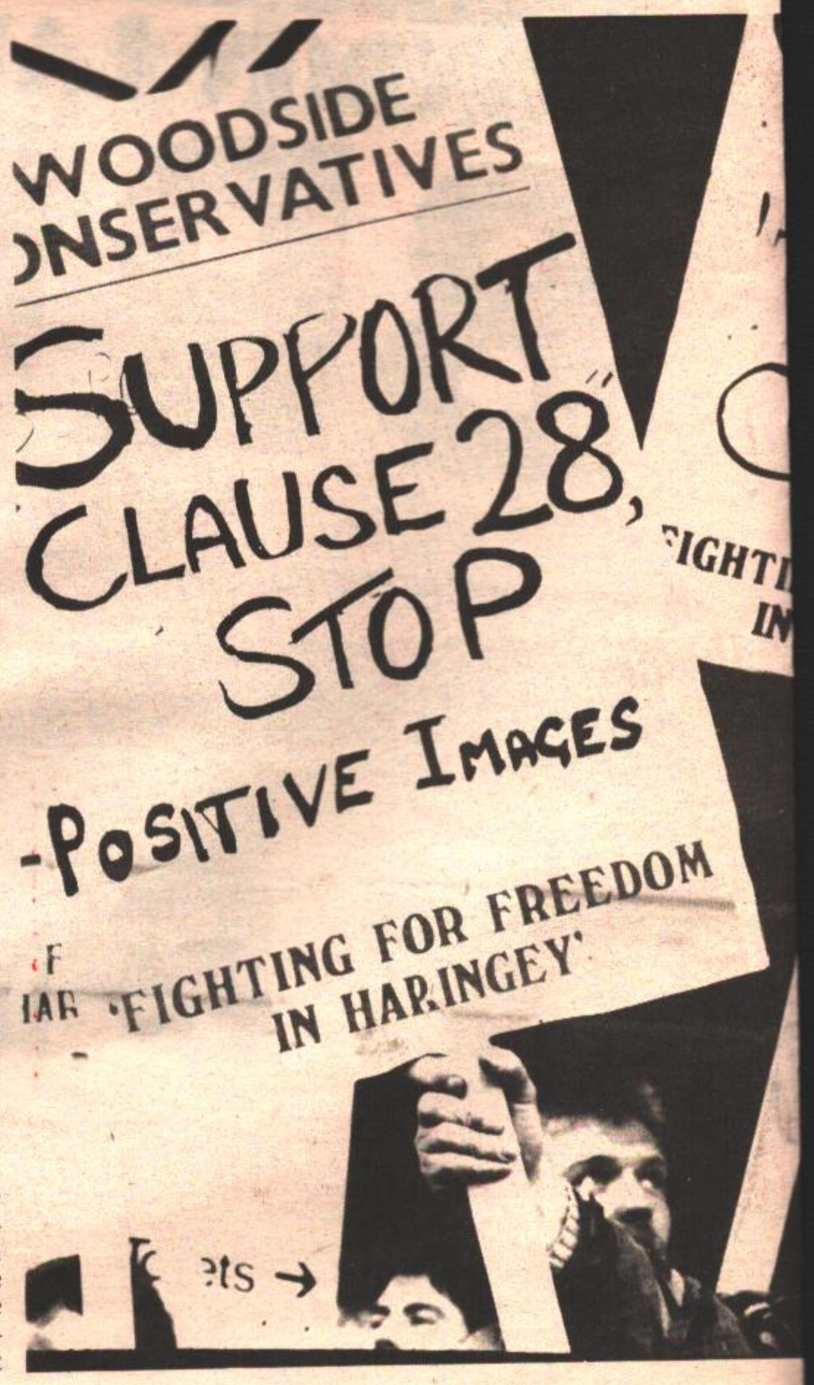
Victories have also been won in stopping the introduction of charges for playgroups, and a strong campaign is gaining momentum in opposing cuts in the hours and wages of playworkers.

NALGO has unsuccessfully taken the Council to Court over its failure to meet Social Services statutory responsibilities — yet the Social Services Chair, Peter Clarke, has himself admitted that some 97 children "at risk" are currently not allocated a social worker and that there are more social worker posts vacant than there need to be, even with the cuts.

Significant

Finally, significant delays and amendments have been forced onto the Leadership's attempt to restructure the Council's committees.

In Haringey the Councillors Against the Cuts have shown that a continued principled opposition to cuts can win victories, can isolate the ardent cutters, and give heart to the continued struggle in the community against the Tories and their policies.



A worker's view

Divide and rule in the Council workforce

The emergence of right wing, racist and sexist elements in the Direct Labour Organisation was expected.

The Council Leadership had effectively abandoned equal opportunities, anti-racism and anti-sexism, along with its opposition to cuts in jobs and services.

The first indication of the backlash came with an attack on the wage rates paid to women operatives training on the building and capital works side of the DLO.

By Callum Johnson
Haringey

Workmen on the maintenance and repairs teams were egged on by an operative to withdraw support from the craft committee.

This came precisely when the government had forced 80% cuts in the funding for rehab, new build, and other capital projects, thus endangering the future of capital works and building.

Cohesion

The attacks have helped to destroy the cohesion of the Craft Committee and drive wedges between the Repairs and Maintenance side and the Capital and Building Works division.

Exploiting issues such as the policy of employing women operatives and the different contractual conditions applying to different works teams, the wreckers hope to help the Labour Council run down the Public Works DLO and thus render it helpless against competitive tendering.

These divisions also help mask the effects of the Council's programmes of cutbacks and voluntary redundancy, which will inevitably weaken the position of the entire workforce when it faces privatisation.

Responded

The Craft Committee has responded quickly and has tried to renegotiate on the issue of contractual overtime, conceded to the Capital Works Building Division some years ago, but leaving maintenance without any guaranteed overtime.

With the reduction in overtime available to the operatives many now find they are taking home no more than their basic weekly wages.

Overtime

Distribution of overtime is in the hands of managers and supervisors who can allocate it to their own favourites. As a result some men get over 40 hours overtime a week incuding of course some of those making the most noise over the wage rates of the women operatives in the Building Teams!

Initially, the managers of the PWS agreed to the union formula, but then rejected it, doubtless after the intervention of right wing Labour Councillors. The Craft Committee has since voted 22 to four to rewrite the agreement maintaining the principle of levelling up the conditions on maintenance to that of the other Division.

Operatives

This will give operatives 35 hours basic plus seven and a half hours overtime, which for maintenance would be conditional on productivity. Given the nature of repairs service, there is no clocking on or site supervision.

The Craft Committee is also boycotting industrial relations meetings and has expressed no confidence in the managers. They will be going direct to the chair of the PWS.

Clearly, the amount of overtime available during a period of cuts must be controlled jointly with the agreement of the entire workforce, not dictated by the personal whim of managers.

Traditional

Efforts have to be made to unite the workforce, overcome traditional differences, and maintain the principles of no compulsory redundancies and no changes in pay and conditions over the heads of the workforce and its elected trade union representatives.

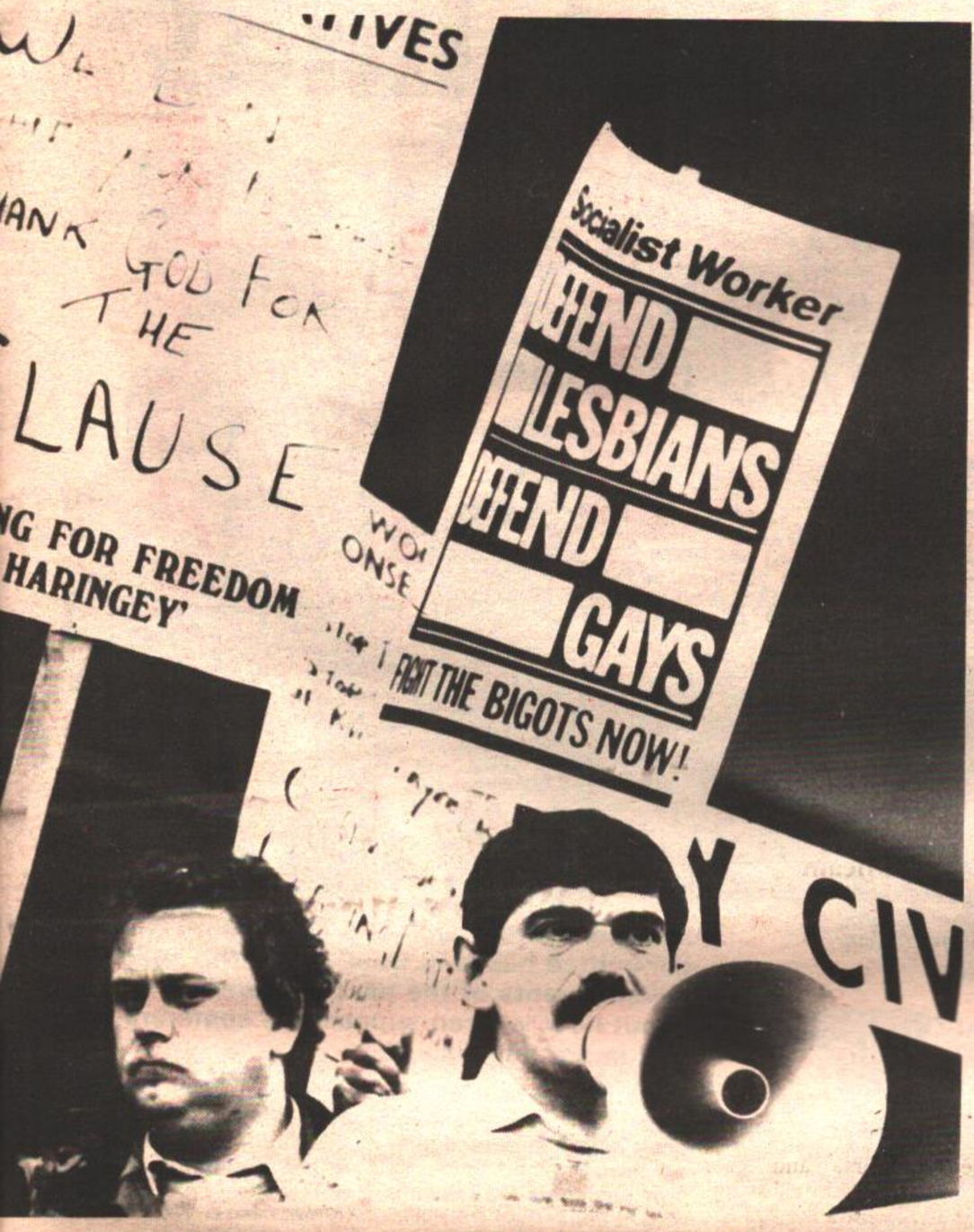
Other manual union representatives have ignored the issue of racism and sexism in the DLO and have given the Craft Committee representatives no support. They have also caved in on other issues, such as cashless pay.

Setbacks

Such setbacks cannot be hidden from the workforce for long and will result not in the victory of one faction or another but in the loss of prestige and negotiating power for all the Local Authority trade unions.

The time is now overripe for a Joint Shop Stewards Committee across the Borough, where problems raised in the DLO and elsewhere can be discussed, divisions ironed out, and the malpractices of management brought to the attention of the shopfloor.

Haringey





PHOTOS: Martine Stead

PHOTOS: Lobby of Haringey Council, April 25th, as the Tories try to close Reading Matters Bookshop — the first use of the not-yet-quite law Clause 28. Left: Labour Councillor Vince Gillespie addresses the lobby while Tory thugs look on, and the SWP signal their presence in the back row. Above: Haringey Lesbians and Gay men make their presence known with a huge banner.

Witch-hunt

Support grows for Mandy Mudd

The Labour Party NEC decided on January 27th to refer campaigning anti-cuts activist Mandy Mudd to the National Constitutional Committee for possible expulsion.

She is charged with *"a sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the Party"*.

The referral followed a series of outrageous allegations cooked up by London Regional Officers in collusion with local Party rightwingers.

The "Haringey Against the Witch-hunt: Defend Mandy Mudd!" Campaign was launched in February by local Labour Party activists to fight for Mandy's right to remain in the Labour Party.

The Campaign was soon in top gear: within weeks a four page printed bulletin outlining the charges against Mandy and their detailed rebuttal had been sent to every Constituency Labour Party in the country.

A fund-raising social recently raised £200. This, and a large number of donations and affiliations have helped get Mandy's case widely known belying the London *Evening Standard's* claim that the campaign was bankrupt.

Support for the campaign has built up steadily over the last couple of months. Mandy has spoken at meetings across the country, including at a successful fringe meeting at NUT Conference; Greater London Labour Party Conference; Bournchurch Labour Party; Finchley Women's Section; Holborn & St Pancras Women's Sections; and Walthamstow Forest CLP.

Hundreds of signatures have been obtained on a petition defending Mandy's right to stay in the Party, from a wide cross section of Party and trade union activists as far afield as Cumbria, Burnley, Tamworth and Brighton.

By Ian Lund
Secretary, Haringey Against the Witch-hunt

Both CLPs in Haringey are now fully behind the campaign — the LCCers who originally instigated the witch-hunt were reduced to a tiny isolated minority when votes were taken at the GCs.

Tottenham Party officers are now bound by policy to "act and speak at all times" in support of the Campaign. This places the CLP's Vice Chair in an uncomfortable position as the author of the original letter accusing Mandy of "intimidation".

Concern to have Mandy expelled quickly and embarassment at the success of the campaign led the NCC to rush Mandy to the head of the 300-plus queue awaiting expulsion and a hearing was set for April 14th.

However, Mandy has been able to argue for the hearing to be put off until June, giving useful breathing space to build the campaign further.

A public meeting has been organised in Haringey for May 19th to rally support (see box). When the NCC finally meets further activities including press conferences are planned to spotlight the true motive behind Mandy's expulsion charge — to silence all political opposition to the Leadership and those who are most effectively campaigning against the Tories.

Haringey Against the Witch-hunt
Defend Mandy Mudd
PUBLIC MEETING
Speakers:
Bernie Grant MP
Sharon Atkin
Jeremy Corbyn MP
Mandy Mudd
Thursday May 19th, 7.30pm
Winkfield Road Day Centre
(off Lordship Lane N17)
Sponsored by Tottenham Labour Party

Letters from London

How would you feel if I locked all the toilets?

Dear *Briefing*,

As London's only left Councillor in a wheelchair, I was somewhat disappointed and surprised to learn that yet again I am being forced into "urinal apartheid" at a Conference organised by left socialists — the North London Socialist Conference.

I was particularly keen to attend, as many of the speakers I know well and admire. I am also committed to left socialism, and have been expelled from the Camden Labour Group for being so.

Naturally, knowing that in this country, and particularly at conferences, I cannot take for granted that the venue will be accessible, I checked this out with the organisers.

I was told that it was — in so far as I could get through the door; but there was no wheelchair accessible toilets or car parking provision — two essentials for me.

I was told by the organisers that they had been informed over the phone that it was accessible, had booked the venue on that assumption, but didn't bother to visit the site or do a physical assessment of their own.

Needless to say, all the Organising Committee members were able-bodied.

I find this particularly irksome because I had offered sometime back to help ensure that an accessible venue was found.

I am getting rather tired of being expected to continue to show my commitment to the left when little or no commitment is shown by the left to people with disabilities.

I don't believe it's my own responsibility to always make sure I can go to conferences. It's as much other people's responsibility to ensure access as it is mine to ensure that child care, vegetarian diets, sign language, interpreters, taping and brailling, and information in ethnic minority languages is provided at Conferences that I organise, even though I have no personal use for such services.

I wonder what able-bodied people would feel if they arrived at a Conference to find that all the toilets were locked and they could not gain access? This in effect is what you are doing to people with disabilities.

You are creating apartheid for people with disabilities — and yet we on the left are supposed to be committed to equal opportunities. I wonder?

Yours in limited socialism,
Cllr Karen Newbury
Camden

Poll Tax possibilities

Dear *London Labour Briefing*,

A poser for you — why isn't there a high-profile London-wide campaign against the Poll Tax yet?

It seems imperative to me that the left set the agenda on this issue. But the only campaign aiming at wide audience is the *People's Petition Against the Poll Tax*. Frankly, petitions are even less likely to defeat the Poll Tax than a strongly-worded letter to the *Times*.

From next April, we shall need a unified approach to registration, involving non-compliance by Local Authorities, supported by radical grass roots direction action.

From April 1990, we shall need agreement on non-payment, and sufficient organisation to translate community anger into disruption of the collection process.

A viable campaign will not develop unless we start building the necessary links *now*.

- Vigorous local campaigns (such as in Greenwich) need to be put in touch with other, less vigorous campaigns.
- Agencies such as the Local Government Information Unit and Shelter need to be tapped for the information needed to campaign effectively.
- Tenants' Associations and manual workers' trade unions, whose members will be impoverished by the Poll Tax, need to make contact with left Councillors and town hall unions which have the power to stop implementation.
- Londoners must draw from the experience of Scottish activists presently organising in the same way we'll have to next year.

A directory of all local Poll Tax Campaigns would be an excellent start. Perhaps then a London-wide convention could give the disparate elements more cohesion?

For my part, I am prepared to provide free copies of material produced by Edinburgh Labour Movement Against the Poll Tax, detailing their campaign for practical opposition to registration and collection.

Finally, for those worried about the legal implications of non-payment, it would appear from Schedule 73 of the Government Finance Bill moved by "Old Nick" Ridley on April 25th, that the likely consequence would be attatchment of earnings. This would deduct the amount payable directly from earnings/benefits plus an allowance for administrative and court costs. We really need a lawyer to research this.

Fraternally yours,
Mark Hill
Islington LGC Poll Tax Working Party
(personal capacity)

Support the seafarers!

Join us on the picket line!





PHOTOS: Nick Hazelwood in Dover

The P&O strike has been led from the beginning by the rank and file.

STEVE POTTER spoke to JASON GROOMBRIDGE and DUNCAN DENNY, two members of the rank and file strike committee based in Deal, about the major developments of the past two weeks, and about how we can support the seafarers in this important dispute.

The calling of the national strike was a major boost for our dispute — now in its fourth month.

The response was fantastic. Practically every ferry port, the supply ships in the North Sea and now, we've just heard, two deep sea ships docked in New Zealand.

The rank and file played a major part in this. McCluskie called up our strike committee and asked us to to out to the ports — a sort of pump priming for the national strike call. Thirty of us went out all over Britain, to Stanraer, Felixstowe, etc.

For example, the P&O crews on the Belfast route were reported to be shaky. Dover has not been well thought of in the past so we needed to go there and persuade them that it was for real this time.

So we went and discussed with them, and then you had the union being derecognised by P&O, the sequestration of our funds and the fine and they were out!

Support from the ports in France and Belgium has been very important. The French dockers have refused to handle any scab crews. French crews have kept their sailings to the normal, not increasing them for the holiday period or for increased traffic.

We had tremendous solidarity coming in for the strike. The phone hasn't stopped ringing this week with offers of money and help on the picket line. Midland Bank tried to freeze the funds of the Deal Women's Support Group, but we stopped all that.

Financial support has been great. All we've received from the union has been two payments of £50, so we desperately needed money just to feed the families. That's what we've done. Local stores and farmers have given great help too.

The strikers are really holding firm. We continue to hold mass meetings every week, to which we get 1,000 people. In Deal we sent out a weekly newsletter to 400 people. With the calling of the national strike we're getting people coming to our meetings who never came before.

Dunlop (the P&O managing director) is pretending he has a majority for a return to work, but that's rubbish. For a start, many of those who signed his yellow form won't cross picket lines.

Our branch secretary has already received 210 letters from those who want to change their decision and take back their forms. And we've had 50 of those who returned to work rejoin the strike.

Dunlop is making up the numbers by re-employing people who have been made redundant and those who are in the middle of applying for medical severance — that's how desperate he is!

Even the scabs have turned militant. When the *Pride of Kent* came in (one of the two ships P&O are trying to operate) the crew walked off demanding their leave.

Another sign of the company's weakness is that they are not operating the ships according to the new Red Book agreement of 24 hours on, 24 hours off, that started the dispute. To keep the scabs happy they are operating the old agreement!

But the ferries are unsafe anyway. They are still ballasting the front of the ships, so that double decker boats can fit into single decker berths at high water. That means water coming two thirds up the bow. That, plus the open doors of course, was what sunk the *Herald of Free Enterprise*.

Safety remains the key issue in the strike — not money. That's why we would say stuff any deals with Sealink and Sherwood (Sealink's chairman). He's offering to employ people made redundant by P&O in exchange for lifting the action. His idea might be to rake in the summer profits and then throw us on the scrapheap in the autumn.

Besides, Sherwood isn't the issue. P&O employ about 70 per cent of the total NUS membership. Their action in derecognising the union and saying all previous deals are null and void means that the NUS must beat them to survive. The way to do that is not to. make deals with Sealink, but to maintain the national strike and spread the action to other unions.

We put that question to Ron Todd of the transport workers at a meeting we spoke at in Dagenham, asking him straight, what instructions was he giving to his members in Dover. One of his members has just been suspended for refusing to tie up a scab crew.

He replied that in any family there were people who would not obey instructions. He said he wasn't going to give his members an instruction, but he would send a telex giving his "advice".

But support action outside the shipping industry is what is needed. John McCreadie of the CPSA called for a 24 hour general strike in support of the seafarers to be organised by the TUC and that's exactly what is needed.

Nobody took that sort of action during the Miners' Strike to defend trade union rights. Now people have a second chance.

Of course the aim must be to get rid of Thatcher. Only if we do that can we really defend ourselves. But to do that we have to defeat the enemy within. The TUC is frightened of calling a general strike, in case they lose control.

We are relying on the rank and file to come to our support. People who helped us like the sacked miners and particularly Terry French, have been slagged off by the press. But if it wasn't for him and people like him, we wouldn't have been able to feed our children; certainly not on the funds we got from our unions.

We completely defend his rights and others to become involved in our dispute. Join us on the picket line!

The strike committee can be contacted at Magnus House, Mill Hill, Deal, Kent. Tel. 0304 367840.

Backing Benn and Heffer in London

Across London, grass roots Campaigns for Tony Benn and Eric Heffer are being set up.

In **Barnet**, the Benn-Heffer Campaign meets next on Tuesday May 17th, at 8pm at the East Finchley Neighbourhood Centre, Church Lane, off the High Road, between the North Circular and East Finchley.

In **Haringey**, 45 people attended a meeting to launch a local Benn-Heffer Campaign. After debate, it was decided to conduct a public and open campaign. Working groups on the Labour Praty, the trade unions, the community, publicity, and public meetings have been set up.

A meeting is planned in the occupied Haringey site of Middlesex Polytechnic. Next meeting, open to all Benn-Heffer supporters, Tuesday May 17th, 8pm, Winkfield Day Centre, 33 Winkfield Road, off Lordship Lane, N22.

In **Lewisham**, a local Benn-Heffer Cmapaign will be launched on Sunday, May 15th at the Lewisham Labour Club, all Benn-Heffer supporters welcome.

In **Hackney**, a Benn-Heffer Campaign has been set up and is planning a public meeting at Hackney Town Hall on May 31st. Contact Jim Thain, Hackney for Benn and Heffer, 4 Heathland Road, London N16.

Victimisation in ILEA

NALGO steward sacked

By MARK SEATON

In an unprecedented move, ILEA has sacked a NALGO Shop Steward in the careers service.

Both ILEA NALGO and the national union have denounced the move and sporadic industrial action against it has taken place.

As a recently employed member of staff, Tony Marriott was on probation. His first probationary report — before he became a steward — was positive.

His second — after he became a steward — was abysmal. He was given one week's notice and dismissed on May 4th.

During negotiations with Chief Officers the real reasons for Tony's sacking became clear. A careers officer with years of previous experience with other Authorities, Tony has been active in organising against the cuts and in implementing the policy of his trade union.

All ILEA members, including Deirdre Wood, are supporting the sacking, despite the clear evidence that it has been done because of Tony Marriott's legitimate trade union activities.

ILEA NALGO has raised a number of vital questions:

- Does ILEA abide by the ACAS code of practice?
- Does ILEA abide by established grievance procedures?
- Does ILEA abide by equal opportunities policies?
- Does ILEA support the union's fight against abolition and in defence of education services?

The answer appears to be "No!" on all counts.

Support the Seafarers!

London Meeting
Monday May 16th
7.30pm

Tolmer Square Community Centre

(close to Warren St tube, corner Hampstead Road, and Drummond St)

The above meeting has been called to promote and co-ordinate support work in London

Representatives of Support Groups and individuals who want to get involved are invited to attend.

Ground floor meeting, no steps
Ground floor toilet, not specifically for disabled use
Some carparking nearby; none reserved