LONDON LABOUR
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40p FORTNIGHTLY
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Hackney

SCABS SCUPPER LIBRARIES VICTORY

So you thought the 1930s was the Golden Age of British Stalinism? Sadly, Stalinist-type techniques of stifling dissent are now being refined to a frightening degree in the Council Chamber of Hackney Town Hall. Just read this incredible tale of bureaucratic class treachery...

The occupation of Goldsmiths Row, Howard Rd, and Somerford Grove libraries began on March 12th: when library workers joined by local residents and activists showed Hackney Council there would be no closures without a fight.

Despite the Council's attempts to discredit the occupiers and scare off schools and parents, the action has gained in strength. Volunteers sleep in to thwart the type of noctural visit which has broken previous occupations.

The Council remained as intransigent as the occupiers. But at the Annual Borough Conference on May 15th, they were plunged into crisis.

The crucial business of the day was an amendment to a no cuts resolution. Rather than call for a deficit budget, it showed how the libraries could be spared without overspend, making no commitment to reversing cuts in other sectors.

Essentially reformist, this proved a successful united front tactic, splitting the soft right. The amended motion was passed by 74 votes to 66.

The jubilation of victorious libraries' supporters met a cowardly, anti-democratic (and, it transpired, preplanned) response from Council Leader Andrew Puddephat. To forestall the election of Council officers, Puddephat moved an adjournment, on the pretext that he could not stand for re-election without financial advice on the effects of the amendment (as if he couldn't have solicited this earlier).

What this amounted to was: "Don't like this game no more: move the goalposts or I shan't play." Outrageously, this contemptuous attitude to the democratic process was supported (with one honourable exception) by the Conference Arrangements Committee, chaired by Lesley Courcouf.

By JIM THAIN
Hackney N. & Stoke Newington CLP

The libraries' response was to build an even greater lobby for the reconvened Conference on May 19th. It was augmented by Hackney NALGO staff instructed to close libraries early. Left Councillors John Bloom, Peter Chowney and Felicity Harvest prepared to take power should the right stand down.

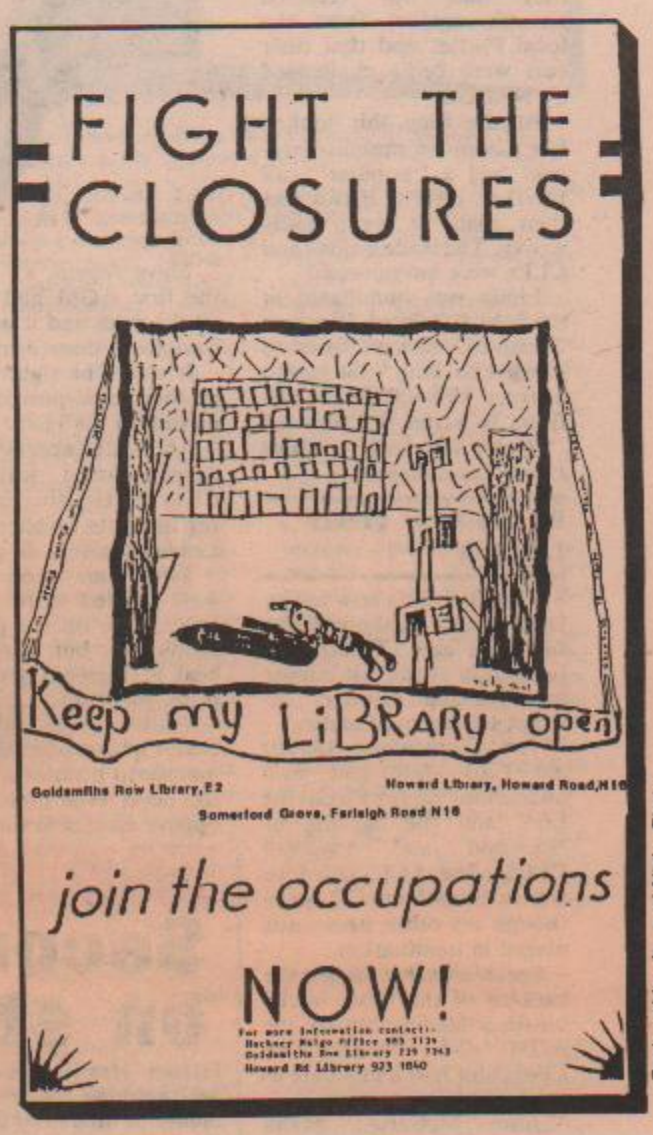
But the Council Leadership had also gone to work. Their master stroke, as representatives of Hackney's toiling classes, was to drive a wedge between library workers and employees of the Direct Labour Organisation to be scrapped by Nicholas Ridley.

Puddephat went to the DLO with a simple message: it's their jobs or yours. Entirely consistent, of course, with their policy of staying in power at any cost — even to working class solidarity.

DLO chiefs responded to Puddephat's message by inciting their members to barrack library workers. Hackney's Labour Leaders are truly visionary.

Such is the ideological bankruptcy of this ex-left Council that Puddephatt is now praised even by the Tories, as is witnessed by a recent Conservative leaflet. Thatcher herself would be impressed by his implementation of the divide and rule tactic.

Inside the Council Chamber, the rank "Stalinism" of Labour Party bureaucracy was revealed in all its sickening putrescence.



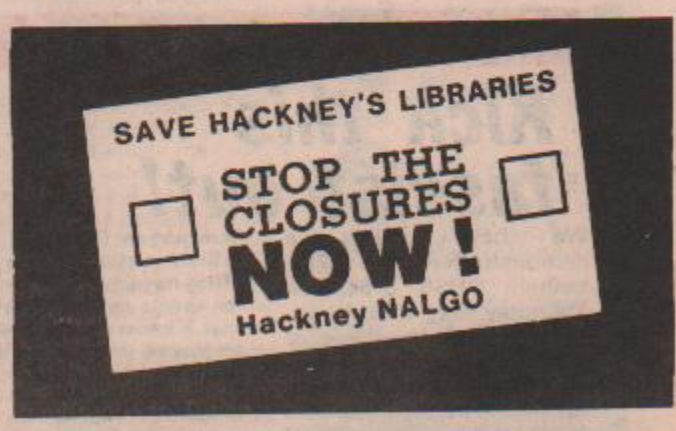
Designed by Jim and Nicky Thain

Puddephat and his minions proceeded to overturn Party policy agreed at the same Conference, claiming contradiction between the libraries' amendment and another resolution endorsing the Council's overall strategy.

To corroborate this wilful misinterpretation of the facts, they presented spurious figures purporting to show how reopening the libraries would result in a deficit budget. The deception was exposed by Peter Chowney, but, urged to resist the libraries amendment, the Leadership's lackeys duly obliged.

At this point, refusing to accord the ABC any further credibility as a democratic policy-making body, Bloom, Chowney and Harvest declined to stand. When Bloom said, "This is the end of the ABC," there was an exodus of left delegates.

The bureaucrats may have split the Party, and they may have split the workforce; but the library occupiers, in the front line in the battle to save jobs and services, will carry on fighting till the bitter end. **No surrender!**



LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Lambeth

LCC take control — but for how long?

At Lambeth Labour Group's reconvened AGM, Linda Bellos and her group of seven class traitors abstained on all the key votes.

With these abstentions, they allowed the LCC to win control of the Council.

In mid-April, Linda & Co. decided not to stand for re-election on the basis that they had not received enough support from the local Parties and that their cuts were being challenged by NALGO.

At the time this looked like a stunt to mobilise support and a "popular" call for their return. If this was their plan, it went badly wrong. The trade unions and CLPs were unimpressed.

Linda was humiliated at the NALGO Black Workers Group EC, which refused to give her backing. (She had to instruct Council Press Officers to scrap the planned *"Black Workers support Linda"* press release.)

By Cllr Steve French Lambeth

The Council is now led by Dick Sorabji (Labour Party full-timer and LCCer) who jumped in at the last minute to block Joan Twelves' attempt to become Leader.

The *Councillors Against the Cuts* slate had won unanimous support from the LGC and the backing of Norwood and Vauxhall CLPS. The LCC failed to win at Streatham GC, even though no other name was placed in nomination.

Sorabji had not sought the backing of the Party in the hustings leading up to the AGM and therefore no Councillor had a mandate to support him.

John "McCarthy" Mann had been the original LCC Leadership candidate, but he withdrew as soon as he appeared to have a chance of winning.

Terry Ashton (General Secretary of the Greater London Labour Party) attended the reconvened meeting following the previous week's "first attempt" AGM which failed to elect a Leader and four other key positions. The centre and right had used the unprecedented tactic of blocking the unopposed left candidates with "confirmation votes"; where there was a pro-cuts candidate, he or she was simply elected.

After an hour of avoiding any response to the LGC's assertion that the results were invalid, Ashton was finally forced to admit that



Steve French

the first AGM had broken all the rules and it would all have to be done again.

It was. The right held on to their new positions and picked up the rest.

Arch-rate-capping scab Janet Boston was made Chair of Housing in return for her vote on the Council Leadership.

Two years ago, Sorabji was deemed unfit by the LGC to be on the panel of candidates, but won on appeal at regional level (surprise, surprise).

Whilst "Loadsacuts" Bellos has turned tail on her manifesto promises, Sorabji has never even pretended to oppose cuts, and during the budget debate wanted to axe even more jobs than the former leadership.

The LCC have no majority on the Labour Group, having bitterly divided with Bellos & Co. when attempting to cobble together a pro-cuts slate.

Following the recent budget debate, support for the left is increasing, especially in the right-leaning Streatham CLP.

Councillors Against the Cuts are not defeated. We have a strong base to continue our resistance. The Parties must demand that the "centre" support Party policy. If they don't — they should be told to resign.

Housing Assistants

Second month on strike

Fifteen Housing Assistants are entering their second month of industrial action at the New Islington & Hackney Housing Association.

By Housing Assistants Strike Committee

We put in a claim for regrading 15 months ago, negotiated for a year until talks broke down at ACAS, and then went out on indefinite strike on April 25th.

The management now agree that the job is a D grade job, but insist on recruiting black and ethnic minority candidates with no housing experience on the lower grade C.

However, they would be working to the same job description as the rest of us! There is currently no training programme at NIHHA — we all just learn on the job.

We find their argument offensive and believe tht it is the job that should be graded, not the individual.

The money involved is relatively small. Management's highest priority appears to be defeating the union. The union group has supported us with all out strike for a day with more action promised.

In the context of the Housing Bill, which proposes to turn Council housing over to Housing Associations, and to attract large sums of private investment into Housing Associations, the strike has a very political edge.

Although it is an official strike, we are only receiving £25 a week from the MSF. We are calling on Labour Party branches and unions to send messages of support to us, make collections (payable to "strike fund NIHHA") and to send letters of protest to the director.

We are also holding public pickets from 12.00-2.00 every Wednesday and Thursday for the duration.

Contact: Aniekan Umoren (union convenor), 123 Kingsland High Street, London E8, tel.: 01 254 1272 (same address for the pickets and the protests to the director).

Tottenham

Kick this fascist out!

We have called a demonstration at Tottenham DHSS office on Thursday May 26th to oppose the employment of known fascist activist Paul Nash, an active and "high ranking" member of the National Front Supporters' Group (one of the many factions amongst the British Nazi movement).

DHSS computers are linked to other government departments, i.e. Home Office, Immigration, Police...

Staff at Hither Green DHSS office have been out on strike for over a month, demanding that a known fascist recently employed there be thrown out.

We are calling on trade unionists, claimants, ethnic groups and everyone opposed to racism to join us. Tottenham DHSS is at 640 Tottenham High Road, and the demonstration will be from 8am onwards.

Tottenham Claimants Union

"Palestine — an eyewitness account"
Open meeting organised by Socialist Outlook
Speaker:
Anna Wagstaffe
(Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine)
MONDAY JUNE 6th, 8pm
Lewisham Labour Club

Access:
Ground floor, no steps, access to meeting
Inaccessible steps to bar; but meeting organisers will assist in fetching orders for those to whom bar is inaccessible
Club has own car park, no reserved spaces but car park is spacious
Disabled toilets currently under repair; to check if fixed yet ring Labour Club on 01 852 3921

Students

Occupying against the cuts

During a Union Emergency General Meeting on May 5th, students at the Kentish Town (KT) site of the Polytechnic of North London voted to enter on indefinite occupation.

By a PNL student

The move was sparked off by a decision taken by management without consultation just five weeks before examinations were to start, that they would be held for all KT students at Bloomsbury Junior School.

A seemingly trivial matter, this is only the tip of the iceberg of management's efforts to push through Tory cuts even before the GERBill becomes law.

We also asked for consultation over broader but equally important issues such as:

- the loss of two black lecturers at the Ladbroke House site (cuts which make a mockery of the Poly's belated "equal opportunities" policy);
- closure of the Doctor's surgery at KT;
- loss of 88 student accommodation flats on the Trowbridge and Clapton Park estates in Hackney (making 133 students homeless);
- and any decision to axe Poly courses, staff or facilities in general.

We also demanded that the Marlborough Building site in Holloway Road, due to close next year, be kept open.

At the end of the first week, management decided to agree to hold the exams at KT and to reinstate the two lecturers at Ladbroke House, as well as keeping the Marlborough Building open (the official version was that they never meant to close it anyway!)

Finally, they agreed to consult students and staff over any future decision affecting the Poly. On Friday 13th the occupation ended.

It was a limited victory. Two teaaching posts are still being axed (retiring lecturers won't be replaced); and management blames Bloomsbury Health Authority and Hackney Council for the loss of our surgery and the flats.

But the occupation has shown management our strength. Middlesex, Hatfield and Peddington Polys supported our action: NALGO and NATFHE came out on our side by boycotting scab lecturers, and the NUR also supported us — although our own "union", NUS, was apathetic.

With more cuts on the way, we are preparing to fight again.

S.E.R.A.

Campaign plans in North London

The Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA) was founded in 1973 to combat the fouling of the environemt and the squandering of natural resources.

By Jon Grantham Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

SERA is convened nationally and comprises a network of local campaigning groups. The Association publishes a seasonal Journal of Green Socialism — *New Ground*.

For too long London has lacked a local SERA group and it was with this in mind that a meeting of interested individuals recently took place at Haringey Civic Centre.

It very quickly emerged that a vacuum does exist in green campaigning in London. Other groups are forced to be apolitical under the terms of their funding grants. In contrast, SERA is an overtly political organisation campaigning around socialist principles.

We decided to set up a North London group, and embark on two initiatives:

- We shall produce an Environmental Charter as a basis for input into manifestos for the 1990 local elections in the capital. The aim of this will be to have a co-ordinated set of policies across all Boroughs.
- We shall mount a campaign around a particular issue — *waste*. This will not only address well established ideas of litter and recycling, but also set the whole issue in its broader political context: what are the sources of waste? How is it disposed of? What are the economic implications of a co-ordinated waste disposal policy?

A (waste?)paper is being prepared for discussion at the next North London SERA meeting.

Future activities:

- Next meeting of N. London SERA: Monday June 20th. Haringey Civic Centre.
- SERA AGM: Saturday June 4th, 10.30am, Haringey Community and Trades Union Centre, 2a Brabant Road, London N22 (nearest tube Wood Green).
- 15th Anniversary Fundraising Cabaret: Saturday June 4th, 8pm, Rosemary branch, Islington N1.

Interested? Contact SERA, 26 Underwood St, London N1, tel. 01 436 0988/9.

Kensington By-election

Soggy Tory drops dead

The death of Tory MP Sir Brendon Rhys Williams has caused the first by-election of this Parliament — a major test of Labour's standing in London.

By a *Briefing* correspondent in Kensington

Sir Brendon was soggier than soggy in Tory terms, and had come under fire from his local Association.

He recently won an unexpected vote of confidence from the Association; probably because most members realised he hadn't long to live.

The new Tory candidate is likely to be a hard-line Thatcherite, who will have to fight a tough battle to defend Rhys Williams' majority of 4,447.

Kensington CLP has not yet selected its candidate but is likely to do so at an emergency meeting in the week after *Briefing* goes to press.

Ben Bousquet, who stood last June, is the clear front-runner, and has the support of Black Sections.

Precisely how Labour's NEC will react to this sudden electoral challenge is not yet clear.

For the SLD, Kensington will be a difficult challenge. The SDP won 5,379 votes in June. Will the voters stick with the newly-merged mixed salads? Will they plump for the Tories? Can Labour win them over?

For Labour, this by-election certainly represents the best chance we'll ever have to win the seat — if the NEC and PLP let us get on with the job.

A so on T hous

Since coming to office in 1986, Tower Hamlets Alliance Council has embraced housing policies worthy of any Tory Borough.

Estates have been sold off to developers, whilst homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation have been used as a scapegoat for the overall crisis in housing.

To help establish the scapegoats, the Liberals have seized on the racism whipped up by the Tories.

In November 1986 the then Leader of the Council wrote to the Director of Housing asking *"why can't large established families move to better areas and their places be taken by homeless families in less good areas?"*

The question epitomises the way the Council sees the homeless as a contemptible burden on its budget rather than as people with a fundamental right to decent housing.

The 1986 "Christmas" edition of Tower Hamlets News stated on its front page:

"expenditure on homeless families has crippled the Council's economy. Over £14m has already been earmarked this year and that could still rise before April... The Council is powerless to prevent this bill from rocketing because they have a legal obligation to house homeless families."

The article reinforced the myth (propounded in this case by Milton Friedman) that *"homelessness is caused by government incentives and intervention. The combination of rent controls and welfare subsidies for the homeless with the income taxes required to pay for them have aggravated the problem they were designed to solve."*

Why does the Council blame homeless families for the housing crisis? The facts do not bear this out.

Only 20% of new lettings went to families from bed and breakfast accommodation in 1985/6, compared with 60% in Brent and 40%in Hackney. In recent years only 23% of three bedroomed flats have gone to homeless families.

SLD-controlled Tower H tent on evicting homeles of Appeal decision in th

The Court wasn't happy ab rying out racist housing polici has already informed several f the worst (see letter).

The move has been descri Uddin as *"vicious, heartbre* come at a time when Labou over evictions between the Borough Secretary.

Following a meeting with Labour Group, and the Chief officers agreed that the Cou passports, bank statements file. However, in a secret me ship, the Borough Secretary Head of Housing Services to

Commenting on the lette *assurances from the Chief E titiously elicited and retained right to hold. The Council h homeless families, outside Clearly the Council has emb cumulation of information w case the Court of Appeal wa*

Cllr Maxwell concluded: *"T Council's contempt for nat racist housing policies. The Chief Executive's assurance being implemented by his ju*

Race, class and housing policy

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Pensioner Bill Turner on demonstration against Tower Hamlets Council policy of selling off estates. Bill has been thrown out of his home on the Waterlow estate in Bethnal Green.

By Cllr Phil Maxwell
Leader, Tower Hamlets Labour Group

The Council has been adept at timing its statements about the homeless to complement the racist hysteria in the "popular" tabloids over issues such as visa regulations affecting families from Bangladesh.

Effectively the Council has reinforced the racist mythology which surrounds homlessness.

An article in *New Society* on Tower Hamlets Liberals quoted the Chair of the Borough's Tenants' Forum referring to *"another lot of Bengalis being brought over as fast as they rehouse the last lot."* Not surprisingly the Tenants' Forum is funded by the Council.

Tory Minister John Patten has admitted that it costs £10,950 per year to keep a family in bed and breakfast. But he also admits that £5,500 per year will pay the debt charges and management costs for a new Council flat, and £7,000 per year will pay for a house.

Using these figures, if we built 4,500 new houses and 4,500 new flats across London for people in hotels, £43 million would be "saved" by London Boroughs. Tower Hamlets would "save" £5 million.

For the Council the homeless "problem" is used to divert attention from its insidious role as a municipal estate agent sustaining private developments though estate sales and planning deals designed to break up working class communities.

It should be noted that the Fraud Squad are currently investigating the loss of up to £13½m via the Homeless Persons Unit. Hoteliers have been discovered overcharging and demanding payment for families not placed in accommodation.

Furthermore, payments to the Council from the DHSS have not been pursued, accruing a massive financial loss. The principal cause of this has been Council under-staffing in the Unit compounded by chaos created by the Liberals' phony decentralisation.

In an attempt to reduce the cost of housing homeless families, the Council has used the law of "intentionality". The High Court has upheld Council evictions of large numbers of mainly Bangladeshi families from bed and breakfast accommodation.

In each case the Council wrote to the families stating: *"it would have been reasonable for you to continue to occupy the accommodation in Bangladesh which, as I understand, would have continued to be available for occupation by yourself and members of your family had you remained there."*

This use of "intentionality" amounts to back door repatriation. The evicted include families with appalling health problems, including a child with congenital heart disease, and a blind single parent with diabetes.

Significantly, following the Tower Hamlets "experiment", the government has enshrined the Council's municipal racism into new immigration laws. Dependents may now only enter the UK if heads of households can prove their families can be housed and supported.

Through this new legislation, inspired by Tower Hamlets "liberalism", the "government of the family" has reinforced the institutionalised breaking up of families.

Case histories explode the myth that the families have no roots in this country. Mr Nazim Ullah is not untypical. He has worked as a porter for many years at Claridges Hotel.

In 1980 he put his name down on the housing waiting list; he has a wife and five children, the youngest only a year old. Mr Ullah has full residential status in Britain; he came to Tower Hamlets in 1963 and has lived in Britain for 24 of the past 27 years.

Two years ago he went to Bangladesh to bring his family over. After leaving a one bedroom flat because of overcrowding they were housed in temporary accommodation by the Council. They were then evicted because the Council claimed they made themselves homeless.

The Bangladeshi community is being made the main victim of the cash crisis facing the Council.

At the 1987 Liberal Party Assembly, Cllr Steve Charters excused the evictions by arguing that *"Councils are being forced to do this sort of thing because they do not have the resources to meet their statutory responsibilities."* In other words, the government-induced crisis is being passed onto the most vulnerable groups.



Demonstration against evictions of homeless families outside Bethnal Green Town Hall.

The government has embraced a sophisticated strategy of investing in homelessness. Just as they are prepared to invest millions in breaking strikes, they are prepared to pour similar amounts into creating areas of bed and breakfast squalor.

The bed and breakfast "industry" not only creates vast profits for hoteliers. It also functions as a form of social control, attempting to debilitate and disenfranchise a huge minority within inner cities.

For the government bed and breakfast lines the pockets of profiteering hoteliers and sustains a rich source of marginalised and non-unionised labour to support service industries in the capital. Current policy facilitates the lucrative transfer of public funds to the "free market" private sector.

The introduction of the Poll Tax will increase the attack on the homeless. More than any other group, homeless people are isolated from the diminishing services provided by Local Authorities.

Nevertheless, a family incarcerated in squalid bed and breakfast conditions will be expected to pay the same tax as a person living in a luxurious Docklands home!

Social control through slum conditions may provide short term gains for the government. In the long term it could spell disaster. We have already witnessed the ability of homeless families to *fight* for their rights.

It is regrettable that this courage has been channelled towards lobbying the establishment. **Neither the courts nor, in the foreseeable future, parliament is going to provide homes for the homeless; only mass action will do that.**

If homeless families are forced on to the streets, socialists need to ensure that families are given support and protection. **A number of direct action options exist to prevent the dispossession of the families, which, at the end of the day, have to be used if necessary.**

Instead of being viewed as an area with a dire need for investment in public housing, Tower Hamlets is internationally renowned as a dumping ground for adventure capital. Millions is being invested in housing and other developments which undermine the ability of the Council to meet housing needs and compound high levels of unemployment.

At its inception the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was *given* 55 of the 63 acres of building land previously available to the Council. 95% of the LDDC's housing developments are for owner occupation. All are well out of the reach of local people — 90% of whom earn less than £10,000 per annum.

The LDDC is accountable only to the needs of big business. **It should be abolished and land returned to the local Council to be used principally for housing.**

There can be no fudging the issue. A future Labour Council has to face up the the fact that it will be virtually impotent in tackling the crisis unless there is **a campaign to repossess, on behalf of local people, the land stolen from us on behalf of capital.**

The public ownership of building land is a pre-requisite to a socialist housing policy.

Cllr Jeremy Shaw, the former Chair of Housing argues that *"we have too much rented accommodation in Council ownership; there's a need for a better mix of homes for rent and for sale to local people at prices they can afford."*

The Council's ambitious strategy of estate sales has only compounded the Borough's housing crisis. The vast majority of people living in the Borough cannot afford to purchase — the average price for a studio flat (bedsit) is £70,000.

The Liberal Manifesto on housing mirrors current Tory philosophy on the inner cities. The Liberal Manifesto states:

"the Council will dispose of property and land to developers, building societies, housing associations, co-operatives and individuals...

"institute a thorough examination of all Council owned land and accommodation to determine its future use...

"promote and support home ownership through homesteading, shared appreciation mortgages, equity sharing, home improvement grants and by reviewing the extortionate service charges levied on tenants who exercise their 'right to buy'...

"publicise alternatives to Council housing, develop better links with the LDDC to get the best for the Borough from their investment in housing."

In *Action For Cities* these aspirations are echoed by the government. The Tories argue that:

"the availability of high quality homes for sale in the inner cities is important to attract back people who will create new employment to stimulate the local economy...

"unused or derelict land can be made available to the private sector for new house building...

"for people with modest incomes 'right to buy', homesteading, self build and shared ownership schemes can offer an attractive alternative to renting."

Both the government, through its cut in Rate Support Grant, and the Council, through its sale of estates, have complemented each other to attack public sector tenants and the principle of *low rent housing* for all who need it.

The scale of this attack on public sector housing — the right for everyone to live in a decent home — has shifted the political agenda around housing issues. The concept of a comprehensive public sector housing provision is no longer sacrosanct within the Labour Party.

Housing is a classic issue on which Labour has allowed the Tories to set the political agenda. Labour's former housing spokesperson, Jeff Rooker, has questioned the large scale provision of public housing managed by local Councils. Instead of responding aggressively to the attack, the Party has too often attempted to be "innovative and creative" within the parameters set by the government.

Ownership

Instead of tackling the issues of land ownership and prices, property prices and the profit orientated building industry, the left has too often buried its head in the ground to discuss the extention of the role of housing associations and co-operatives and the right to buy.

The bankruptcy of this approach manifests itself when Labour Councils (such as Camden) attack the homeless or utilise the resources of the Metropolitan Police's Riot Unit as part of their housing management team (as in Hackney).

Housing is a complex issue and there are no simple solutions. However, there are fundamental principles on which a socialist housing policy needs to be based.

A socialist housing policy cannot be achived within the framework of a free market economy. Property and land prices have to be controlled and building land publicly owned. Similarly the building industry has to be brought under public control.

These aren't new principles, but they are perhaps more relevant now than ever.



PHOTO: Andrea Campbell

Demonstration against evictions of homeless families outside Bethnal Green Town Hall.

Racist evictions

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Chief Executive Officer and the

Cllr Phil Maxwell, Leader of the
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critical of them."
his despicable episode shows the
ral justice and its increasingly
Court of Appeal should seek the
that his original instructions are
or officers."

From Bill Tomlinson
Housing Strategy Officer

Dear Mr

I refer to my previous letter of 23 December 1987 when I advised you that the Council would continue to provide temporary accommodation for you and your family until the decision of the Court of Appeal on some other cases, where the facts were similar to your own, was known.

The Court of Appeal decision was handed down on 27 April 1988.

My understanding of the Order is that it requires the Council to do the following:

1. send you a letter of decision, setting out the basis of the Council's conclusion that it was reasonable for you to remain in the accommodation which was available to you in Bangladesh;
2. if the Council is able to formulate such a letter from the information which was available to it at the date of your original decision letter, it need make no further inquiry;
3. if the Council is unable to formulate such a letter, because of any inadequacy in its investigation, it must make further inquiries before writing a further letter of decision;

The Council takes the view, however, that it is entitled to take into account all information before it at the time when it writes the letter, and this will be done.

I am writing to inform you that this process will take place within the next seven days and I will write to you again.

Focus on London's health

Bloomsbury Cuts

A £2m 'sacrifice to the gods'

Bloomsbury Health Authority has agreed drastic cuts of £1.9 million.

The Health Authority was facing a shortfall of £6m between what it needs and what it's got from the government.

They have decided to:

- Close the **Soho Hospital for Women** as a centre for gynaecology and cut the number of women treated in the speciality by a fifth. **Cut: £700,000.**
- Close **St Peter's Hospital** — although the Unit Management Board says this *"has long been regarded by staff as a total break in faith with longstanding assurances that the relocation of the St Peter's Hospitals' service would happen in a planned and orderly manner"*. **Cut: £300,000.**
- **Cut Family Planning Services**, although the local Community Health Council warns: *"In the light of the agreed need to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies in Bloomsbury the closure of further community clinic sessions would be particularly counter-productive."* **Cut: £109,000.**
- Possibly close the **College Health Service**, unless the colleges find the money to take this on themselves. **Cut: £160,000.**
- Chop the **Development Fund** for priority services for local people. **Cut: £630,000.**

In addition, the Health Authority called for massive cuts in the number of people treated who happen to live outside the immediate area.

Commenting

Commenting, Camden Councillor Ben Griffith, who is a member of Bloomsbury Health Authority, said:

"There's no doubt that the cuts agred will take great chunks off the NHS locally. The Health Authority is trying to shrug off its responsibility to care for people who don't actually live in the area.

"They're simply turning their back on the commuters and the ill people who come here for treatment because their GP thinks that's best for them. We should welcome these patients, not tell them to go private or go without.

"That's not saving Bloomsbury Health Authority — it's destroying the National Health Service.

"The bulk of these cuts were agreed simply as a sacrifice to the gods in the Department of Health. The trouble is that assumes the gods will be satisfied. All the evidence is they'll just come back for more."

Taken from press release against Bloomsbury cuts

Where the axe will fall

Save St Peter's!

St Peter's Hospital, facing closure by Bloomsbury Health Authority (see above) is the "flagship" of a vital group of four hospitals carrying out kidney transplants, dialysis and other specialist treatment.

The group (St Peter's, St Philip's, St Paul's and the Shaftesbury) was described by mangement last year as "pre-eminent in the fields of Urology and Nephrology".

But now there are fears that it could be swallowed up in efforts to solve Bloomsbury's problems of under-funding.

Closing St Peter's would save less than £300,000 running costs towards Bloomsbury's deficit of £6m: but developers are already eying up its Henrietta Street site. The property value of the four hospitals, all in the Covent Garden area, is estimated at £40m.

Staff

Staff — from consultants to porters; from cleaners to ward sisters — are furious at the panic plan to shunt the 39-bed Hospital into a cramped 30-bed ward at the Middlesex Hospital (left vacant by previous cuts).

The move — decided in April with no consultation and no time for proper planning — would break up the loyal team of doctors, nurses, ancillary and technical staff which has made St Peter's so friendly and supportive for patients.

Some staff would lose their jobs; others, who have chosen *not* to work in the large, impersonal Middlesex Hospital, would be forced to choose between transferring there or looking for a new job.

Nobody is opposed to the original plan of relocating the St Peter's group to a new, integrated Centre on the Middlesex site: but now it seems that the search for short-term savings could lead Bloomsbury into an asset-stripping binge, breaking its pledges on this, and undermining or abandoning the long-term future of this key specialist unit.

Petition

Staff have launched a protest petition to stop the closure which will disrupt treatment for existing patients, outpatients and future planned admissions. Consultants are calling on Health Minister Tony Newton to intervene personally to halt the closure.

Meanwhile a campaign is getting underway, with meetings, lobbies and protests aimed at persuading Bloomsbury Health Authority to think again — especially those members who nodded through this closure in April without debate or consultation.

The campaign has appealed for support from health unions, other unions, community and other organisations, MPs, Councillors and concerned individuals in Bloomsbury health district and Westminster.

If you would like to help, contact 01-833 9347 and ask for Leigh (switchboard), June Weeks (ext. 40) or Jean Douglas (ext. 18).

(Taken from campaign leaflet)

NURSES' PAY RISE

Reject the Tories' 'divide and rule'!



PHOTO: Martine Stead

March 5th: marching to defend the NHS

NAOMI HILLMAN interviewed DIENEKE CHAN, Staff Nurse at Charing Cross Hospital, about the nurses' pay rise recently conceded by the Tories. Have the Tories capitulated to public pressure? Or is there, as there always has been before, a hidden sting in the tail?

What do you think of the nurses' pay rise?
It's only a promise so far — we've seen nothing yet. Even if we do get a 15% rise, it won't change how we think about work, or solve the problems of short-staffing and bad housing.

How short-staffed are you?
In this Health Authority, we're working with about a 30% shortage of nurses. In fact, the Authority couldn't afford to pay us all if we were fully staffed!

In Canada the nurses got a 100% pay rise some years ago. Very soon after, half the nurses lost their jobs! This government will follow that example — it won't really spend any more on nurses than before, due to the short-staffing.

Nurses are difficult to recruit now, especially in London, with high rents. Sometimes we just about manage with agency staff. Sometimes we don't manage.

Will more people take up nursing now?
I think many more are *leaving*. Accommodation fees are going up, and we've been told the nurses' homes may be closed, so there is no feeling of security of tenure.

The housing is terrible, anyhow, with rapes and burglaries happening. It makes morale very low.

What has the overall effect of the pay deal been on nurses who took strike action in February and March?
There's expectancy in the air, after all these months of waiting.

The pay rise all depends on clinical regrading. Each nurse must be assessed individually by her/his local manager. It's a deliberate manoeuvre to keep us waiting and to foster divisions between nurses.

I feel most sorry for the student nurses — they will see very little out of the pay deal. Their percentage increase will be substantially lower than for qualified staff, and this must only widen the gap between them. The students seem extremely fed up at being used as hard labour for so little return.

The students and young nurses took the responsibility of organising the last two strikes. I was very impressed that not one asked for more money. The placards and slogans were all for "Full Funding for the NHS".

Of course, that includes better wages for all healthworkers, but it proved our unity. And that unity with other hospital workers is still there, waiting.

Riverside Health Authority has been told to cut its budget by £8.9 million. How will that affect you?
The Authority meets on May 26th (as *Briefing* goes to press) to vote on its own plan to close *five* local hospitals — the Westminster, Westminster Children's, West London, St Mary Abbotts, and St Stephens! This is a shocking cut in health services, almsot too huge to contemplate.

It would have tragic consequences for local people, with the loss of large numbers of beds and cots. Staff would be moved around and over 600 jobs lost.

My department would amalgamate with its counterpart from Westminster Hospital and become a Speciality. Charing Cross would house all the specialist departments and cease to be a local general hospital. Ordinary people round here would be forced into private health care — if they can afford it.

As for the staff at Charing Cross, we are telling them not to be complacent. Our workload may increase by 30%. Our work standards would almost certainly drop and there wouldn't be enough space to work in. We may see new contracts being issued, like the P&O workers.

I cannot see this happening without a fight. People can only take so much.

This obviously calls for a huge anti-cuts campaign. How are the healthworkers responding?
The enormity of the cuts and the timing (following hard on the heels of two strikes) has taken many healthworkers by surprise. The young nurses who led the strikes are still learning how to run a long battle and join with other workers.

Management has told the public some amazing lies and advertised their plan as an *improvement* in health care!

However, we have retaliated with our own information campaign and have been helped by the huge public support for the NHS. Our local "Help the Aged" has played a big part in tapping local support. The links we made between the five hospitals during the strikes have been invaluable.

London Healthworkers

The London Health Workers Co-ordinating Committee has arisen from the body which played a major part in making the one-day strikes on February 3rd and March 14th as successful as they were. Open meetings are now being held every two weeks. The bulletin, London Healthworker, can be received if you send a donation to Andrew Phillips, c/o Union Office, Royal Free Hospital, Pond St, London NW3. Please make cheques payable to Charing Cross Hospital JSSC or Royal Free Hospital JSSC (while accour for LHCC is being opened).



Underground Safety

Tubewatch reveals further job cuts

As safety levels on the London Underground come under the most intense scrutiny in decades, the London Underground chiefs plan a fresh attempt to cut costs and shed staff.

Tubewatch, the bulletin which campaigns for safety and decent conditions on the Underground for passengers and workers, has revealed proposals by London Underground Ltd which will affect some 10,000 frontline staff.

The plans amount to a sharp increase in work, a reduction in pay and conditions and *more* job losses.

Such changes can only decrease safety levels at a time when the public and staff are extremely concerned about the state of the underground system.

The proposals are a sick joke. Coming at a time when London Underground chiefs are accused of putting costs before safety, these changes would result in hundreds of jobs being lost and an incredible strain being put on remaining employees.

London Underground Ltd should be forced to withdraw these proposals immediately. "Flexibility" and "productivity" are not the answers!

(Taken from Tubewatch press release)



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