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Tower Hamlets Liberal Council does Tories dirty work

UNITE AGAINST RACIST ATTACKS ON THE HOMELESS!

Following its trail-blazing, racist evictions of homeless Bangladeshi families, Tower Hamlets Liberal Council is set to make history yet again, and inspire a major undermining of statutory provision for the homeless.

This comes amid increasing concern amongst the top ranks of their "mixed salad" parent party — the SLD.

By Jenny Fisher Bow & Poplar CLP

Tower Hamlets evicted homeless Bangladeshi families from Bed and Breakfast accommodation (by stopping paying the bills) on the outrageous grounds that the families were "intentionally homeless" — as they had left accommodation in Bangladesh.

This completely flaunts the right of the families to live in Britain — which is not under question. It also plays on racist hysteria by ignoring the fact that many of the families have been settled in Britain for many years — some members for most of their lives.

The Association of Liberal Councillors and the Parliamentary Liberal Party have both condemned the actions of Tower Hamlets Council.

Simon Hughes has written twice to the Council, and has also condemned their action. Hughes blamed the evictions on government restrictions on local government finance. Fundamentally this is the true cause — but the Council has still found the money to carry out court action against the families rather than house them.

The Council has gained much from their action. It is not a question of the bills of the families concerned — it is also a question of lowering expectations amongst the black community in London about their housing rights; and encouraging the racists in the white community to blame black people for their share of the housing crisis.

Tower Hamlets Council has also provided fodder for the Tories to pursue the divide and rule tactic they thought they were the masters of; and undermine the housing rights of black people through the statute book.

The current Housing Bill has always been seen by the left as just the start of a fundamental attack on opportunity in housing for working class people. As reported in the press, it now seems that the next target will be the homeless. The Tories are considering the repeal of the 1977 Housing and Homeless Persons Act, and a major redefinition of "homelessness" — to the new definition of "rooflessness". The statutory right to access to permanent housing is under threat of being replaced with a right of families to temporary accommodation only.

This is where the Tower Hamlets Liberal policy of "investing in racism" pays off. If the homeless are portrayed as black people who have no right to be in Britain, then "investing in homelessness" is the next step — and the homeless will find themselves isolated as they are attacked.

The labour movement must see through this class attack by the Tories, and respond with class solidarity, in a united campaign.

Meanwhile, the Tower Hamlets homeless families are no longer all in the Church Hall they were offered sanctuary in after their evictions. A variety of organisations, including the Church, have found a ramshackle collection of temporary accommodation while the Homeless Families Campaign continues to press for permanent accommodation to be offered.

As we go to press, the latest development is that the HFC presented individual families to the Social Services, pointing out their obligations under the Child Care Act to work to keep families together. In an astounding political intervention, undermining the professional role of officers to assess children's needs, the Council Leadership instructed them not to use Section 1 money to fund any continued stay in Bed and Breakfast.

Are the Tories listening? Will the next thing we see be an attack on statutory provision of Social Services, as Tower Hamlets Liberals do the Tories dirty work?

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Focus on Hackney

Library occupations: Council issues summons

The Leadership of Hackney Council has issued a summons against "the unknown occupiers of Goldsmiths Row, Howard Road, and Somerford Grove Libraries.

This followed their triumph at the Borough Conference, where by a combination of intimidation and manipulation they secured the reversal of a previous decision to reinstate the six axed library services.

These libraries, which have been occupied by library workers, trade unionists, and members of the local community since March 11th, have provided an ever growing focus of opposition to the Council's cuts policy.

More and more peole are finding it unacceptable that the Council is prepared to do the Tories' dirty work for them and attack its own workforce and local supporters.

People know what damage library cuts cause to the education of the Borough's young people, to the elderly, to people living in run-down communities — in fact, to all the people the Council claims to care about.

Many have taken an increasingly active role in the fight to save library services.

By DAVE KEANE

The Council, on the other hand, has become increasingly determined to crush this movement — hence the summons.

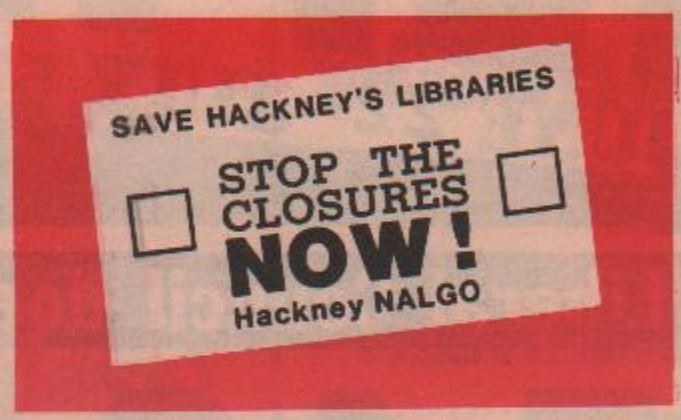
The summons, taken out by Keith Stevens, the Head of Library Services (and a NALGO member) is for a repossession order. It rather hypocritically cites us for unlawful use of Council property — because we provide a book lending service!

The Council's lawful plans had been to deprive the communities around the three libraries of any booklending service by putting the materials into store.

The affidavit goes on to say that the Council wants to use the buildings for "wider community service" with "hopefully some booklending facilities". If the Council gains repossession it is very doubtful that any of these things will happen.

Particularly appalling, from the workers' point of view, is the Council's total disregard for their trade union, NALGO, and of the collective bargaining process.

From the start of the occupation, we have been calling upon the Council to meet us to discuss our demands for the reinstatement of the lost library services. Though we have stated repeatedly that we want a negotiated settlement, the Council, in a manner to gladden the heart of a Tory Employment Minister, has simply ignored us, and gone to the Courts.



Library workers are holding a Departmental meeting to consider what to do next. Initially we will be building for a one-day strike and lobby of the Courts on Friday, June 24th (the day of the hearing).

We will appeal to the whole Hackney NALGO Branch to support us on that day through a Borough-wide walk-out. We will also call for a strike ballot of the whole branch — the only way we can re-open the libraries and force the Council to take notice of the trade union and honour the established negotiating procedures.

Things are hotting up in other departments. The Council is threatening to dock the pay of Housing Mobile Patrol workers for following long-established trade union policy of not covering for vacant posts. This action may provoke a strike.

As the Tory attack on public services grows fiercer and as our Labour Councils increasingly act as the Tories' agents, the workers have to respond with increasing vigour to defend themselves and their services.

One final indication of possible things to come: at present, Hackney Council has frozen nearly all recruitment. They are, however, currently advertising for bailiffs!

- **No library closures!**
- **Hackney Council: Fight the Tories, not your workers!**
- **Drop the Court action!**
- **No victimisation!**

Lobby the Central Office, Royal Courts of Justice, The Strand, WC2, at 1pm on Friday June 24th.
(Hackney Teachers Association have already promised support).

Hackney Health Emergency

40 Years of the NHS

With Mark Miwurd, Big Red Band, Joe "Seamonster" Brand, Maria Callous, Annie Connell, Diane Abbott MP, Brian Sedgemore MP, Local Healthworkers

Assembly Hall
Hackney Town Hall
Tuesday July 5th
7.30pm

£3 waged, £1.50 healthworkers, £1 unwaged
Tickets available on the door
Sponsored by Hackney Council

Council elections

Win some, lose some

On June 16th the left suffered a setback when *Briefing* supporter Andy Buttress failed to win a Hackney Council by-election.

Here's why:

- This was a dual by-election, which encourages cross-party voting.
- Many supposed Labour supporters refused to vote for Andy because he is openly gay, and/or for his running mate Joko Macfoy because he is black.
- The ward contains the largest Council estate in London and angry tenants are on the receiving end of the Council's strategy of implementing Tory cuts.

This combination of bigotry and disaffection gave the Green Party enough votes to hand the seats over to the Tories.

In two other wards, Labour rightwingers held their seats, and we may now expect a further stepping-up of the witch-hunt fuelled by the decision of the Annual Borough Congress not to re-open three occupied libraries.

Following this, rabid rightwinger Gez Mullally had a vote of no confidence passed on *Militant* Councillor Lynne Faulkes, and is trying to have the whip withdrawn from her. *Workers Power* supporter George Binette has been removed from his post as Branch Secretary. Now it is surely *Briefing's* turn.

The right will find fresh inquisitional capital on June 24th, when the Council hauls library occupiers before the High Court.

But we should not become bitter. These struggles steel us for the greater battles ahead.

By Jim Thain
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

A deal th won't wo

When the current administration took power in Hammersmith and Fulham in 1986 the number of left Councillors came as a shock.

***Briefing* supporters stood in marginal wards, and few were expected to be elected. But with the local election straight after the Fulham by-election, Labour swept to power.**

The result was three roughly equal sections in the Labour Group — right, soft left, and hard left. The soft left did a deal with the right, and took the Leadership, though the hard left gained a number of posts — notably Chair of Housing and Chief Whip.

The hard left — with support from some of the soft left — fought to adopt an expansionary programme. They were particularly successful, but eventually, under the threat of resignation from the Leader, the programme was pruned.

Some members construed this as "cuts", and resigned from Council Committees (but remained members of the Group).

The Kinnockite policy for the last two years has been studied in action. They were, however, forced to obtain a large loan, mainly to build new housing.

By various strategems, take-up of the loan was delayed, thus allowing the Tories to pass retrospective legislation outlawing it. This devastated the Council's house-building plans. Other manoeuvres included delaying the appointment of staff to vacant and newly created posts.

This strategy was not without problems. The left opposed many of the measures, and the right objected to cuts in the housing capital programme.

Both right and left argued that more resources should be allocated to housing. Eventually, this policy opened divisions within the centre. A gap widened between those wanting action, and those keen to maintain inactivity for their own reasons.

In the Group AGM this year, three people stood for Leader: Gordon Prentice, the incumbent, ("Kinnock's" man); Hugh Thompson, from the other half of the soft left; and Mike Goodman, a maverick right winger.

The two centre candidates had a running mate for Deputy. The right didn't, and on the left Ian Harrison from the *Briefing* Group decided to stand for Deputy Leader. Some comrades wanted Harrison to stand for Chair of Housing, but he refused.

By ALAN LENTON

Harrison recognised that he had no chance of beating Vivienne Lukie for Deputy, so a campaign was launched to ensure that she withdrew. Since Lukie would withdraw if Thompson wasn't elected, the comrades set out to stop Thompson becoming Leader. This meant backing Prentice or Goodman, and they decided on Goodman.

Confused? Read on, comrade.

Prentice is a Senior Local Government Officer at Walworth Road. His job is to ensure Laboir Councils toe the line. Thompson also comes from the soft left. Politically, there is not a lot to distinguish them — except that Thompson opposed the policy of inaction.

Goodman was judged by many — especially the Harrison grouping — to be the weakest candidate. When the Fulham Party launched a witch-hunt against *Militant*,

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th & Fulham

at rk



Ian Harrison

Goodman supported it to the hilt. As Fulham delegate to Party Conference, he spoke in favour of the expulsion of *Militant*.

Last year Goodman was the Chair of Planning. He allowed Chelsea Football Club to redevelop its ground in a way which drove a cart and horses through planning regulations. Eventually, the DoE called in the scheme for investigation. He then refused to fight the Tories over a public enquiry on the redevelopment of the Island site. His (in)activity on this issue incensed local groups and they plastered the area with "Wanted" posters!

Finally, he admitted at the Group meeting following his election that while he was Chair of Planning he had been the company secretary of a building company doing work in the borough, but had not declared his interest!

Some comrades justified their decision to back Goodman in various ways. Some argued that *Militant* are the right wing and deserve to be expelled. Others argued that there was no difference in the politics of the candidates. Even if this argument is accepted, the fact that Thompson came out as gay a long time ago means that they should have applied positive discrimination and voted for him.

Seeing Goodman as a weak candidate the comrades fell into the trap of believing that they could "slide in" left policies on the side. Social Democracy is littered with the corpses of others who have fallen into this trap!

There was a large measure of agreement on the left, the right, and part of the centre on the importance of housing. A set of policies could have been agreed with the breakaway centre. Over time, there *might* have been a political realignment. The possibility existed to change the balance of forces in favour of the left.

This is not to say of course, that these things would have definitely happened, but a clear possibility existed and it was the responsibility of the left to try to realise it.

Instead, comrades opted for an organisational solution. The result is already clear. No realignment of forces has taken place and the resentment of the breakaway centre at the behaviour of the Harrison group is pushing them back into the arms of the Kinnockites.

The comrades have got themselves into an unenviable position. They have sacrificed a lot to get where they are — but they can't get any further without more of the same. And, after making all those deals, what will happen to the socialist hopes with which those comrades took their Council seats?

ILEA

Computing staff fight back

As part of the abolition of the GLC, the London Residuary Body was created to dispose of the GLC's assets.

One of the biggest of these — apart from the County Hall buildings themselves — is the Central Computer Services (CCS), which now provides computing facilities to many of the scattered remains of the GLC and, of course, the bulk of ILEA.

ILEA was originally to have taken over CCS, but with our abolition coming up, cuts, and, one suspects, government interference, CCS is to be privatised for free in one of the biggest giveaways since the Westminster cemeteries.

Hoskyns is a large computer contractor, set up by Sir John Hoskyns (one of Thatcher's leading advisers). It is now owned by Martin Marietta, a large American aerospace concern with huge defence contracts (it built the Challenger rocket which exploded).

It is grabbing CCS in a "facilities management" deal, getting the equipment (actually hired), 300 trained staff (computer staff are scarce and expensive), and massive "goodwill" and standing contracts. It is even getting a subsidy from the LRB to run the services!

To collect the staff, especially the Systems Analyst/Computer Preogramers, they have offered consolidation of bonuses and other benefits, bringing a big jump in salary for some.

But on conditions they are less appealing: no equal opportunities policy, maternity pay back to the legal minimum, cuts in holidays, rudimentary discipline and grievance procedures, and no union recognition.

Staff were offered "counselling interviews" at which job offers would be made on an individual basis. The joint unions, GLSA and NALGO, responded by calling a mass meeting which voted overwhelmingly to boycott these interviews until outstanding issues were settled.

Hoskyns and the CCS management responded with cosmetic improvements to the grievance and disciplinary procedures, minor concessions on maternity pay, and "equal opportunities within CCS only".

By a CCS worker

After ten days of fruitless negotiation, the unions called another mass meeting on June 1st. Hoskyns management went over the unions' heads, and issued a bluntly threatening letter to all staff, with a tear-off slip at the bottom offering three options:

- interview and job offer
- accept a job without bothering with an interview
- no job.

This slip, the letter warned, had to be returned by June 2nd — or *no job*.

The second mass meeting voted overwhelmingly to resist this blackmail and the slips were to be collected by staff representatives and held pending a satisfactory agreement.

Around 100 of the slips were collected, including all the vital systems staff. Within a day, the June 2nd deadline was withdrawn and a whole series of concessions on staff side representation had been made.

At the time of writing, it is not clear how substantial these concessions are, but they seem to be a move towards recognising the unions in all but name.

It is clear that Hoskyns intends to use CCS as a foothold to make a big grab for Local Authority computing service when new government legislation forces them to put the services out to tender. Many battles over trade union and other rights are to come. Local Authority computing workers should watch out — *Hoskyns is about!*

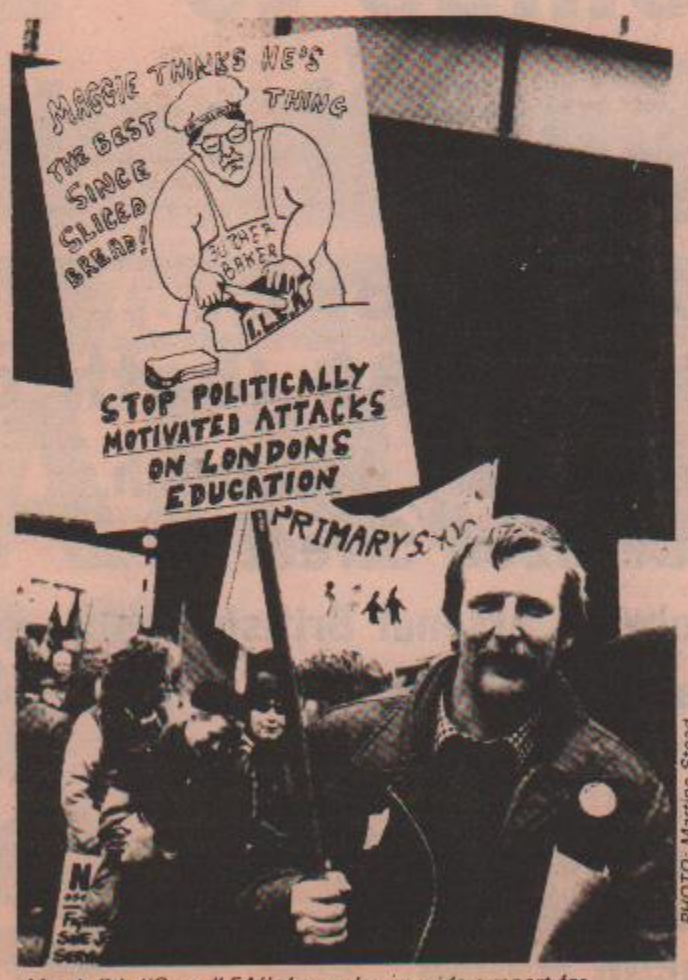


PHOTO: Martine Stead

March 8th "Save ILEA" demo shows wide support for education in London.

Anti-Apartheid

Make direct links!

Seventy people attended a public meeting in Woolwich called by Greenwich and Bexley Anti-Apartheid.

Speakers included a representative of SATIS (the official Anti-Apartheid campaign for South Africa's detainees), and Terry Bell of the Friends of Moses Mayekiso Campaign.

A member of the South African union NUMSA spoke about the huge support for the biggest stayaway in the country's history.

He also described the top level meeting involving NUMSA, SACTU (the South African Congress of Trde Unions), and the ANC which appears to have overcome earlier hostility to the Friends of Moses Mayekiso Capaign. Moses is the Leader of NUMSA,

By Mike Phipps Chair, Greenwich & Bexley Anti-Apartheid

and is now on trial for treason for his role in the Alexandra Township Committee.

The most important contribution was made by Lionel Morrison, last year's NUJ President. Morrison, himself a former treason trialist and veteran of several years in South African jails, argued strongly for direct links with trade unions there.

He explained how NUJ branches had twinned directly with South African trade unions and raised material solidarity to support them.

Responding to a sometimes sharp discussion, he argued that *all* the organisations fighting apartheid deserved the support of British activists.

Marriott victimisation

Sacking was "political decision"

Sacked ILEA NALGO Shop Steward Tony Marriott — victimised for his trade union activities — continues to press his case for reinstatement.

Alarm bells are ringing in County Hall corridors.

When a concerned constituent confronted Islington South ILEA Member Joan Hooker about the sacking, he was told that the matter had been discussed at a meeting of the Staff Committee attended by the Head of Personnel — and Hooker admitted that it had been a "political decision".

Not that it matters, but Tony is not a member of *any* political party.

Hooker, ILEA member with responsibility for Careers Service (where Tony worked before being victimised for his trade union activity) revealed that the sacking was for "breach of contract", thereby confirming that previous tales of "failure to meet probationary requirements .." were what NALGO had always claimed they were — pure fantasy.

By Briefing supporters in ILEA NALGO

Tony is being strongly backed by his own ILEA/GLS NALGO branch and by NALGO nationally. (John Daly has written to the Authority about the matter).

This is the latest and one of the most outrageous in a long history of harassment and victimisation of NALGO and other trade union stewards by ILEA officers, all too often backed up by Labour members trying to prove that when it comes to management they can be as tough as the Tories.

Tony Marriott has a case pending before an industrial tribunal (claiming wrongful dismissal for trade union activities). Meanwhile, NALGO members are taking industrial action on his behalf. Following a successful day of action on June 8th (when 60 NALGO members picketted County Hall), the Branch has called another one on Friday June 24th.



PHOTO: Richard Hawkins

Political pressure is an essential part of the campaign to get justice for Tony Marriott. ILEA residents should take up the issue with elected members at their surgeries (details of surgeries from ILEA/GLS NALGO on 633 5569/70).

Please pass the following resolution in your branch, section, trade union and GC:

"This ..... deplores the sacking of an ILEA NALGO Shop Steward from the ILEA Careers Service. We call on the ILEA Labour Members to:

1. utilise their authority to ensure the reinstatement of the steward;
2. set up a member-level inquiry into the sacking of a NALGO Shop Steward which will investigate:
a. abuses of ILEA's equal opportunities policy
b. flouting of the ACAS Code of Practice
c. the ignoring of the grievance procedure of the ILEA.

Defend Jobs and Services in the ILEA. Defend the ILEA!"

If passed, send copies to ILEA members, GLLP Executive members, ILEA/GLS NALGO.

Socialist Conference

"Chesterfield" comes to South London

July 2nd-3rd; 10.30-5.30 (both days)

Thames Poly, Woolwich, Calderwood Street

(Woolwich Arsenal British Rail)

Speakers include:
Jeremy Corbyn
Sharon Atkin
Betty Heathfield
Lindsey German
Duncan Hallas
Hilary Wainwright

Saturday Morning

Main Session: Black Liberation and the fight against racism

followed by workshops:
Immigration and deportation; Southern Africa; Black people in the labour and trade union movement; Black people and the education system; the threat to civil liberties.

Saturday Afternoon

New Realism and the Fightback against the Tories

Workshops:
Building solidarity with workers in struggle; Health; Education; Local Government; Unemployment; Lesbian and Gay Rights; The environment and Green Politics; The Rights of People with Disabilities; The Economy and the Socialist Alternative.

Plenary Session:
The Poll Tax

Evening Social

Sunday Morning

Women's Liberation and the struggle for socialism

Workshops:
The Family and Sexual Politics; Abortion Rights; Organising Women in the labour and trade union movement; Black Feminism and the struggle against double oppression.

Sunday Afternoon

International Solidarity and the Battle for Liberation worldwide

Workshops:
South Africa; Palestine; Ireland; Eastern Europe; Disarmament and NATO.

Final Rally:
Creating a Movement for Our Time — for a fighting, united left

London Demonstration
in support of sacked P&O seafarers
Wednesday June 29th

Assemble 12 noon Hyde Park corner

We will march to P&O's headquarters in Pall Mall and Picket

March called by London Support Groups

All Briefing readers are urged to attend, and to publicise this demonstration in labour movement bodies and campaigns

