LONDON LABOUR
BRIEFING
10p TRIAL ISSUE

TAKING OVER THE G.L.C.

LABOUR MUST WIN IN 1981

by Ken Livingstone
(Hackney North GLC member)

1980 is the year in which we will determine policy and select the candidates for the May 1981 GLC election. For the first time the election will be a major event in the struggle against a Tory government.

By the end of this year the government plan to have passed legislation forcing the sale of council houses and giving Heseltine power to withhold government funds from councils refusing to make cuts.

Undoubtedly the Tories will try to use those new powers and select several London Labour boroughs as the prime targets in their campaign.

The election must be used to rally support for councils refusing to make cuts and to mobilise opposition to the Tories' policies. It will be a major defeat for the Tories if we win a decisive majority on the GLC at the height of Heseltine's attack on Labour councils.

GLC and ILEA finances must be used to help any Labour borough from whom Heseltine withholds government finance.

An immediate decision to close down the GLC Housing Disposals department will stiffen the resolve of borough councils to refuse to sell council housing.

It is this role into which the GLC will be thrust which is responsible for the present interest in GLC election plans — in marked contrast to the past. At previous elections few have been willing to stand due to daytime meetings and the remoteness of the GLC — most activists have directed their attention to the borough councils. This has led to the GLC/ILEA Labour groups being even less representative than the Parliamentary Labour Party. Now there is something close to hysteria amongst these people as for the first time in many years they face a serious challenge to their positions.

Already a third of the Labour group have decided to retire and others are becoming regular attenders at their GMCs for the first time since the last elections.

Three recent decisions by the Greater London Labour Party have disturbed the present Labour group.

1. The London annual meeting has voted in favour of automatic reselection for all GLC members thus ensuring the first selection meeting in living memory in some constituencies.

2. The Regional Executive has decided that the GLC election manifesto shall be determined by the whole party at a full delegate meeting on the 18th of October.

In the past the manifesto was written by a small group (including a full time GLC officer!) and steamrolled through the Regional Executive with threats of resignation if any major changes were made.

This year the Regional Executive will circulate discussion documents to all affiliated organisations and these will be

(cont. on bottom page two)

Editorial:

This is the first trial edition of *London Labour Briefing*. Your initial reaction may be that the left needs another newspaper like it needs another Reg Prentice. However, this is a bulletin with a difference. It is not produced or controlled by any one tendency or group, and does not claim to be able to provide full coverage of international events or to give an in depth theoretical analysis on every issue! We have set ourselves the more modest but vital task of keeping active militants inside the Labour Party and the unions in London in touch with each other and up to date on what is happening in the various battles across the capital.

No doubt you yourself have often been misled or confused by stories about events in neighbouring Boroughs and in other CLPs. If we can lift some of the fog that surrounds us so often we will be achieving part of our job.

Comrades should also be aware that this year we begin the arduous task of selecting our candidates for the GLC elections in 1981. For far too long the largest local authority in Western Europe has been the 'poor relation' as far as Labour Party organising and activity is concerned. We aim to rectify this by giving full coverage to the many issues involved: housing, transport, education and finance amongst them. We will also cover the various selections and candidates as the need arises.

Perhaps even more important are the Borough elections for the following year. We will systematically cover each borough borough's record, what its Labour councillors have done and the issues locally that affect the Labour movement. We will also follow the new re-selection procedures for parliamentary candidates and sitting MPs, which we strongly support as a means of making our elected representatives more accountable. We will also cover the activities of bodies like the GLRC, GLATCs and the South East Region of the TUC.

If this venture is to succeed we need your help: not in a passive sense of reading and donating to us (though that certainly helps) but as active contributors. If this is to give comprehensive coverage we need input from every Borough in London. If you are willing to be a 'key-person' for your CLP or area, please write to us and attend the various meetings we organise.

We are now at a crucial time for Labour. If a successful fight is to be mounted against the cuts, and if this Tory Government is to be removed, then we must prepare now for the enormous struggles ahead. Organisation and information are the keys to success. Make sure you become an effective component of our overall strength. One contribution towards this will be *your* support for this new publication.

LONDON NEEDS SOCIALISM !

* A Major Commitment to Public Transport

We must campaign for an *immediate* 25% cut in fares; a crash programme to purchase additional buses; improved wages and conditions for London Transport staff in order to reduce mileage losses due to staff shortage; an expansion of the maintenance service to get buses back on the roads and a crash programme of bus lanes and other bus priority measures.

In the medium term we must integrate British Rail services into the LT network and introduce a fare free system so that public transport becomes the dominant form of transport in London. Fares subsidy must come from the rate so that commerce and industry contribute. As 62% of the GLC rate falls on the commercial ratepayer the average London family could travel free on London Transport in return for a £1 a week increase in the rate.

* Education

The Labour controlled ILEA was the first local authority to comply with the government's demand for cuts. A package of 42% has been agreed. We must reverse this decision and improve the pupil teacher ratio. The ILEA plans to close up to 50% of all secondary schools in each borough must be stopped. The recent rising birthrate, which has already increased by 10% from its 1977 low point means that continuing school closures now would lead to overcrowded schools in 11 years time when these children are of secondary school age.

* Housing

The bulk of the GLC's housing stock will have been transferred to the boroughs but there will still be 96,139 properties left which are concentrated in Inner London.

These are neglected, near slums which suffer average rents £3 a week higher than the highest rented Labour boroughs.

We must freeze rents for the period of the next GLC and institute a crash programme of internal and environmental improvements. There must be immediate devolution of management out of County Hall to local areas with full tenant involvement. Tenants must be allowed transfers as of right within estates.

The GLC must immediately stop the sale of council housing and fight the government in order to establish a crash programme of municipalisation and new development.

A direct labour department must be established.

* GLC staff

The GLC must act to end low pay by adopting a realistic minimum wage and bringing manual workers onto a 35 hour week. Camden has already adopted this policy and if every Labour council in London did the same it would create nearly 10,000 new manual jobs. As unemployment will be 2,000,000 by 1981 this is a key policy.

Union representatives must be co-opted onto all committees at the GLC so that they can bring their first hand experience to bear on the problems we will face. TU reps must also be appointed to the London Transport Executive. The cuts in the fire service must be restored.

The list is endless. The executive policy documents cover other areas such as planning, employment and finance and there is no shortage of radical, socialist policies. We must ensure that there is no shortage of radical socialist members to carry out the policies we agree.

(cont. from page one)

subject to amendment at the October meeting.

The manifesto we decide in October will have far more authority than before and must contain firm commitments binding on the Labour group. We must ensure all candidates undertake to accept the decisions of that conference and fight for their implementation after the election.

3. Annual meeting has voted that the leader of the Labour group shall be elected by the GLC annual meeting. The executive is proposing detached rule changes to this year's meeting. Once these have been agreed they are then forwarded to the NEC for endorsement. The new system will operate from 1981 and it will no longer be possible for the GLC Labour group to ignore the party's policies as they did during the 1973-77 Labour GLC.

We must immediately begin discussion within the movement about the policies we need to win popular support and bring genuine change at the GLC.

Already the CLV and other far right elements are organising to ensure the return of the bulk of the old 1973 Labour group and to prevent the above policies being included in the manifesto. We must begin the debate now if their scheming is to be exposed and a firm socialist manifesto agreed.

We can win the biggest victory ever at County Hall and strike a damaging blow against the government. It is essential we start that fight now.

Health Cuts in West London

Pete Rowlands
Secretary
Hounslow Trades Union Council

On December 5th the Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow Area Health Authority finally voted through a package of cuts worth over £2 million with a commitment to further cuts if these do not prove sufficient. Proposed cuts include the closure of two hospitals, bed reductions at the West Middlesex Hospital and an agreement in principle to the sale of sites (including Hounslow Hospital which the AHA had solemnly promised would be re-opened).

At its previous meeting on October 24th the AHA had substantially rejected a cuts package, although at the same time had agreed to balance its budget—impossible without making cuts. However, at the December 5th meeting five representatives switched votes, including one from the Labour Party, and this enabled the cuts package to go through.

The proposed cuts come on top of progressive cutbacks made over the last three years, a reflection of both the last Labour government's cuts plus the RAWP (Resources Allocation Working Party) Formula for redistributing resources from 'overprovided' areas of which we are one, which has resulted in this authority being faced with more drastic cutbacks than most, in effect a double cut. The cash limit system has made an allowance for inflation far less than the real rate, exacerbated by the Tory budget which increased inflation and raised VAT which is not reclaimable by the health service. This has cut into real expenditure considerably this year, although it should not be forgotten that these and other health cuts derive from the last Labour government's cuts programme, which bore so heavily on the health service, more so than on local authority provided services where Labour authorities were some form of defence against their own government! It is important that this fact is not overlooked because the maintenance and improvement of our public services must be an absolute commitment for any future Labour government.

The cuts in the health service first proposed in 1976 generated a campaign in the Ealing Hammersmith and Hounslow area which has been active ever since. These cuts included in the Hounslow district the closure of three small hospitals and one of these, Hounslow, was 'worked in' up to the closure date in August 1977 following which the hospital (with the support of doctors and ambulancemen) was kept open until the notorious 'raid' of October 6th 1977 when patients were snatched from the hospital. This unprecedented and disgraceful event rebounded on the AHA by the focussing of national publicity on Hounslow, promoting London-wide strike action in the health service, and making the beginning of the 14-month occupation of Hounslow Hospital, which received massive support from the trade union and labour movement during which time Hounslow was projected as a symbol of opposition to the cuts then beginning to ravage the health service. During this time Fightback emerged as a campaign against health cuts. Following the ending of the occupation in November 1978 an area campaign against health cuts has been active, and in September of this year a West London Assembly against Cuts, promoted by the health unions and supported within the trade union and labour movement and community generally in the area, has actively campaigned, focussing on the October 24th AHA meeting.

There has therefore been a broadly based campaign consistently fought over three years against health cuts in the area, a campaign embracing the trade union and labour movement and the community generally which has attempted to draw the private sector of the T.U. movement towards greater concern with the public sector, which has sought to bring pressure to bear on the AHA and CHCs, aided considerably by some excellent trade union representatives on these bodies.

The initial rejection of cuts by the AHA reflected past campaigning, and was an important breakthrough in the wake of the refusal of the Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark AHA to make cuts. Any widening of this breach would have been damaging and embarrassing for the Tories, and much pressure was no doubt exerted to effect a reversal of their decision, aided by press distortion of the engineers' strike at Charing Cross Hospital which occurred in the intervening period—not necessarily a coincidence.

An enquiry into labour relations in the AHA is being prepared by Hammersmith Trades Council, where in that district of the AHA four leading militants have been got rid of in the past two years. The health unions and the West London co-ordinating committee against cuts are preparing a new campaign against this round of cuts. The struggle continues.

INGLORIOUS ISLINGTON

by
Councillor Valerie Veness

* 41% Rates Rise
* 15% Council Rent Increase
* 5% Cuts in Services
* 189 Jobs abolished
* Voluntary groups forced to close
* Council properties repairs cut

This is the sorry package agreed by Islington's Labour Group at its meeting on 10th January. The proposal to fight the cuts and raise a rate necessary to protect all the jobs and services only attracted 13 votes in a Labour Group of 50 councillors, and a compromise that would have saved all the jobs at the cost of increased charges and certain savings on growth was also defeated, this time by a narrower margin. The actual rate increase for the former would have been about 47% and for the latter 43%, or 13p and 4p respectively extra per week for the average Islington domestic rate-payer! In rejecting these options, the Labour group meeting opted for the savage cuts listed above.

These packages still have to be ratified by a full-Council meeting on the 29th January, but this a foregone conclusion as the Labour Party has 50 out of 52 councillors, and the two Tories usually vote loyally with the Labour right-wing on any major cuts issues (although, ironically, one of them once dissented that the housing cuts went too far!).

Still more discouraging for the left was the fact that a motion not to raise council rents got only 8 votes. The right-wingers who blathered on about not imposing burdens on the rate-payer were only too enthusiastic about imposing an added burden on the council tenant of over £2 per week on average. Even worse, the unique 'shared singles' scheme to help house single people through voluntary groups onto some of the Borough's oldest, and frankly grottiest, estates and thereby reduce child density on them, has also been under attack by raising rents for these flats from an average of £11 per week to one of £30 per week. The new Housing Chairman, Councillor Pryce, had the effrontery to justify this by comparing it with the 'average market price on the open market', but then as a merchant banker he should know all about the market. It all shows that the right wing group who have controlled the Council for the last year or so do have a narrow-minded spite and prejudice unusual even in Labour groups. Nevertheless, a major fightback has started. The Islington LGC has come out strongly against the cuts and supported the position of those councillors who voted against them. All the three GMCs have opposed various actions by the Council and a swing to the left has occurred in all three parties. To translate this into votes on the Council is now one of the key tasks ahead.

Right Attempts Witch-hunt

RATHER THAN bashing the Tribune left directly, Healey and Co. have opted (quite sensibly from their point of view) to resurrect the spectre of 'entryism' and 'Trotsky-ite infiltration', with demands for the publication of the Underhill Report and expulsion of the Militant tendency. This, they hope, will throw the left back on the defensive and pave the way for victory at Blackpool in 1980. Can they succeed?

Undoubtedly the odds are against them. In a period of rising class struggle against the Tory Government, the right-wing's campaign will be seen for what it is by the majority of the Labour movement: an attempt to divert the struggle and divide our movement when it is under attack. Also, the right themselves aren't exactly united — their most discredited elements, led by Roy Jenkins and backed by the Liberals, are toying with the idea of a 'Third Party', a strategy which the 'sensible' right knows is disastrous.

However, there is one thing the Tories in our movement do have going for them and that's the complacency of the left.

Intoxicated by the euphoria of its Conference victories the left has tended to rest on its laurels and allow the right to make the running. The 'compromise' solution of an Inquiry into party organisation was undoubtedly a mistake. While the Inquiry may not pose an actual threat it has enabled the right to bog down the whole debate and stall for time. It's high time the NEC really put its foot down, and began the Inquiry irrespective of demands from Basnett, Callaghan and the PLP.

Now is the time to renew our offensive against the right-wing rump in our party:

1. No Witch-hunts: Defend the Militant — for the right of all labour movement tendencies to affiliate to the Party (why should the Fabians have a monopoly!) and to organise for their political ideas.

2. For the defence and extension of democracy in the Labour Party. The ideological and organisational struggle must be taken up again not only in the constituencies but most importantly the trade unions.

3. For the election of Party Leader, preferably by Annual Conference. Healey must be defeated. Benn for leader!

The Labour right couldn't give a fig for democracy in our Party. In the good old days, when they had total control, they made sure they kept it by manipulating the right-wing unions and by regular expulsions. Seeing power slipping through their fingers, they have suddenly been converted to 'grass roots democracy'. They are on the run and now is the time to demolish them politically for good!

Frank Hansen (Brent East CLP)

Lewisham Bends to Pressure

Last November, over 140 delegates of the three constituency parties in Lewisham held a local government conference. The most controversial item was a resolution from Grindling Gibbons Branch, asking that Lewisham take a "Lambeth" stand, as well as insisting that only councillors who were prepared to stand by this policy would be selected for the next round of local government elections in 1982. The resolution was defeated, by 73 votes to 70. Of course, it wouldn't have been binding even if it had been passed, but the Left's defeat certainly made it easier for the Labour council to bend to pressure from the Government.

At the Labour Group's meeting in early December no firm decisions were made but a small working party was set up to look at various options of which the following were the alternatives:

a) NO CUTS	66% rate increase
b) £1.6 m cuts	59%/60% rate increase
c) £6 m cuts	40% rate increase

At the last meeting of the Labour Group in January, the Working Party came up with various recommendations which included possible rent increases in October. It is likely that for the moment no cuts will be made, although ways of making "painless" cuts were discussed (but the pruning has already been made). However, the majority of councillors still argue that cuts are "inevitable".

Ron Pepper, Chairman of East Lewisham L.P. and Chairman of Housing, proposed that the entire Labour group should resign and that the electorate be given the opportunity to decide the issue at local elections. This was defeated by 23 votes to 15 with 5 abstentions. This proposal was perhaps wrongly timed, because in Lewisham, (unlike Lambeth), there has yet to be any public political campaign to fight the cuts. This issue would be better raised in November when Heseltine may try to claw back from any Authority which has exceeded his nitional notional rate of 119p in £. Then it may be possible to go to the electorate and win on a slogan of "Defend our Services" and "Local Democracy"—but only if a campaign is begun now.

Ron Stockbridge proposed at the last Labour Group that Lewisham initiate a Conference of all London labour councillors in Labour controlled Boroughs to thrash out some of the difficult decisions facing Labour councils over cuts and rates. This resolution was remitted. But this type of conference is vital if Labour councils aren't going to be left alone to fight the Tories. There is crucial information that's needed from other councils, particularly on the issue of rate increases.

For many years, Lewisham's Labour-controlled council has had a relatively good record in terms of local government services and in the fight against fascism (in which the councillors took an unusually principled and active stand). However, historically Lewisham has always been right wing. Now, though, things are becoming polarised for the first time reflecting, to some extent, the Labour Party conference decision to make our representatives more accountable. Those of us in Lewisham who want to stiffen the council's fight against the Tory cuts will be bearing in mind, for instance, the voting record of nominees for next year's GLC elections. We should remember that only 3 votes were cast in favour of no cuts in the ILEA's budget for this year. One of our nominees in Lewisham who is on the ILEA Education sub committee was not one of those three.

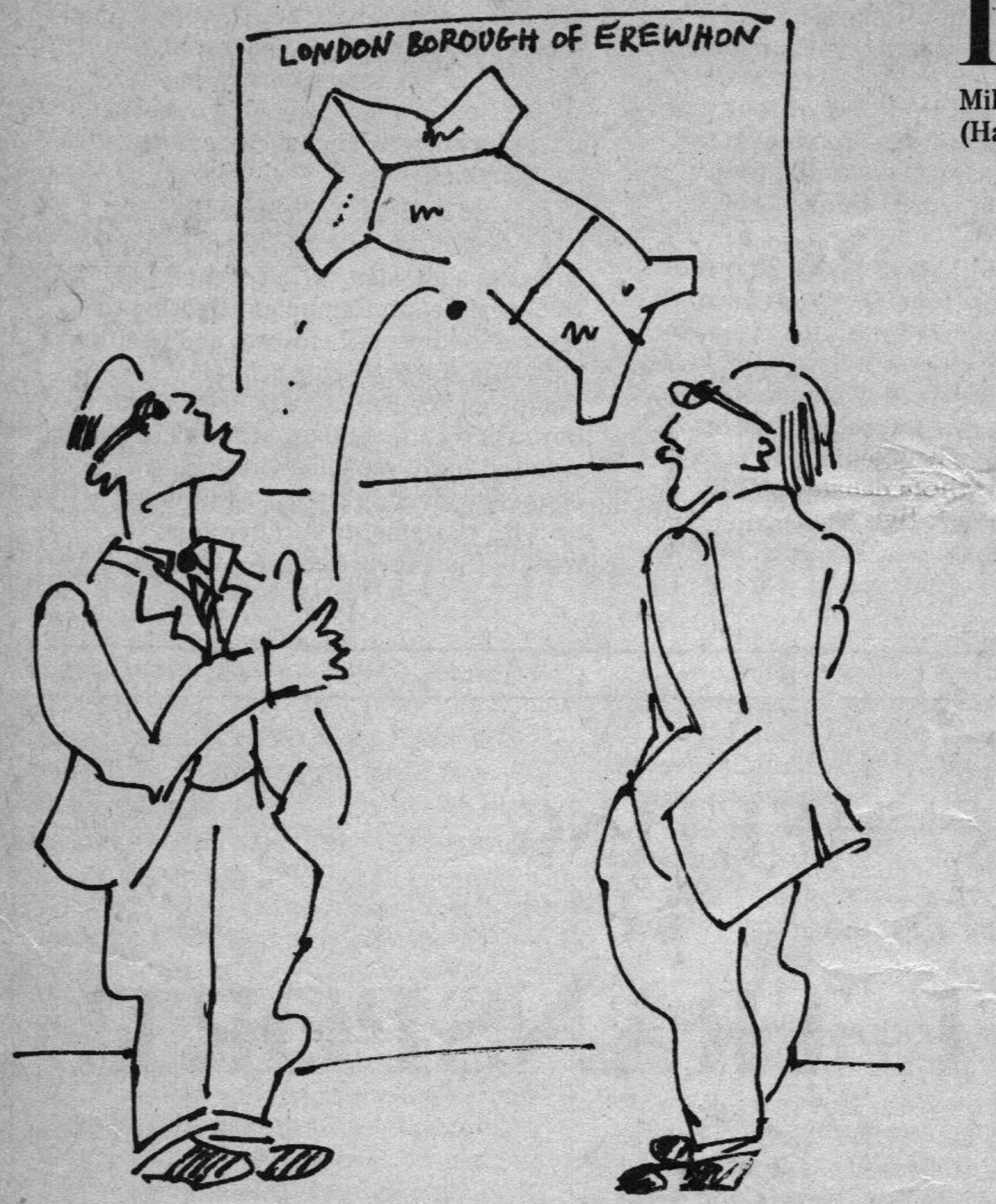
Ann Knight
St. Andrew's Branch East Lewisham L.P.

Lewisham: The arithmetic of a rate increase

Higher precepts from the GLC, ILEA, Met. Police		17.6p
Pay Inflation Plus Committed growth = £17.7 million		42.1p
Reduced appropriation from the General Rate Fund balance = £1.4m		3.3p
***LESS* Rate support Grant (needs element)**	16.4p	
	Increase:	46.6p
Add General Rate for 79/80		89.0p
Provisional General Rate Poundage for 80-81		135.6p
***Less* Rate Support Grant Domestic element**	18.5p	
Provisional poundage for domestic ratepayers 80/81		117.1p

THE WORST OF ALL WORLDS IN HACKNEY

Mike Davis
(Hackney South CLP)



Hackney council's contribution to fighting the cuts and standing by Labour Party policy has been to call one public consultation meeting last October. The pre-meeting publicity consisted of a handbill entitled 'Our hands are tied' which confused more than clarified. Although Although attended by 500 plus, the meeting did little to provide a coherent strategy against the cuts. council leadership gave no lead, no details were mapped out for a campaign of action, no further propaganda in defence of the radical manifesto and alternatives to cuts, no concept of the need to build unity with trade unionists and tenants against the Tories.

Ever since Heseltine's announcement of a cut in the Rate Support Grant and the new cash limits, acting council leader John Kotz has played his cards close to chest. Not until January 1980 did it become clear what the leadership were planning. At a succession of committees, departmental officers presented the leadership's trump cards which consisted of cuts of up to 5 per cent, tabulated on a sliding scale of horrors which grew worse as the amount saved grew higher.

(cont. on back page)

The attached table shows what is happening in each Labour council as of late January. An asterisk indicates where Labour groups have yet to take a final decision. Although 7 councils are shown as having made no cuts, many of these (such as Brent) have cut out growth items which would otherwise have gone ahead.

Of the 7 'no cuts' councils, only Lambeth is mounting an active campaign against the government. Some Labour leaders have decided to try and avoid attracting government attention. Unfortunately this attitude only further exposes Lambeth council.

	BOROUGH	RENT INCREASE	CUTS	RATE INCREASE	RATE INCREASE WITHOUT CUTS
	CAMDEN	NO	NO	35%	—
*	LAMBETH	NO	NO	49-56%	—
*	TOWER HAMLETS	£1.50	NO	30%	—
	WALTHAM FOREST	£1.00	NO	48%	—
*	GREENWICH	YES	NO	25%	—
	HOUNSLOW	£1.40	NO	44%	—
	BRENT	£1.00	NO	38%	—
*	LEWISHAM	?	£2 million ?	?	66%
*	HARINGEY	£1.50	YES	40%	70%
	NEWHAM	NO	5%	37%	
	BARKING	£1.35	5%	34%	
	SOUTHWARK	17%	5%	46-50%	
	ISLINGTON	15%	5.3%	41%	47%
	HACKNEY				

LAMBETH LEAD NOT FOLLOWED

(cont. from page five)

Besides a 25 per cent increase and a rate increase somewhere over 40 per cent Hackney is being presented with plans to reduce the quality of services in virtually every area. In housing, the total reduction in the budget is scheduled at £7½ million to arrive at the Provisional Money Allocation (cash limit) imposed on each committee. Cuts would range from a 40 per cent increase in heating charges, proposals to rent rather than purchase vehicles (saving £30,000 annually) which would threaten the jobs of fitters and maintenance workers, to increases in laundry charges for the disabled and incontinent by 400 per cent, a doubling of rent for homeless families in bed and breakfast, a 50 per cent rent increases for 16 year olds living in care, cuts in mobile patrols and scrapping the pilot scheme for reintroducing resident caretakers (pledged in the manifesto).

Other services up for pruning include social services where its recommended that Meals on Wheels charges go up from 13p to 25p and three out of four new day nurseries recently completed to cater for much-needed under-fives provision will remain under wraps for 'lack of staff'.

The Broad Left of about 25 out of 60 councillors (one Tory) has been divided on tactics for battle. A smaller group favours a no-cuts, no rate rise, go bankrupt now stand while others have advocated a rate increase sufficient to maintain services and jobs and start improvements.

However, with the leadership going for the worst of all worlds with its package of 'realistic measures' — as the leadership dub them, at least the left should be drawn together to oppose the whole rotten package. The borough's three CLPs are committed on paper to opposition to social spending cuts but only Hackney North has done much campaigning.

The task now is for councillors and CLPs to link up with the Trades Council anti-cuts campaign, with tenants, the Hackney Health Campaign (fighting to reverse the hospital closures and health cuts) and the Save Our Schools Campaign (fighting to save half of the borough's 15 secondary schools) to form a a united body capable of reversing the council leadership's plans and joining up with movements in other areas to repulse the Tory offensive.

PUBLIC MEETING

SOCIALIST TRANSPORT POLICY FOR G.L.C.

Room 166

County Hall, 7pm.

Wed. 12th March

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