LONDON LABOUR 40p
BRIEFING
No 44 NOVEMBER 1984

IT'S WAR!

WAR HAS been declared on the whole trade union movement. The £200,000 fine on the NUM means that the entire working-class movement must be placed on a war footing from now on.

Our position on the 'law' is made clear in this issue of BRIEFING in statements on other pages. Basically, we are insisting that no ruling-class court can have any jurisdiction over the status – official or otherwise – of a strike. For these purposes, the highest 'courts' in the land are the TUC and Labour Party conferences, and in this case both have affirmed the official status of the miners' strike. Since the Tory High Court disputes this, it is a battle between our law and theirs. If we were to allow the NUM to be destroyed, then the Tories' 'law' would rapidly reveal itself to be naked class dictatorship – naked violence by the state to crush all opposition from the organised working class.

In this situation, we must not allow the trade union leadership to stand idly by while the strongest union in our movement is smashed. The Tories are bent on all-out class war. We must respond in kind – including preparing for general strike action should this course be forced upon us in the very near future. It is the trade union and Labour Party leaders who have the responsibility to act – but it is our task, too, to ensure that they are not allowed to evade this responsibility. Resolutions demanding general strike preparations must be passed up from the grass roots of every union to the top. The 'contempt' declarations being circulated by the Miners' Defence Committee are a useful means of measuring support and of mobilising to give adequate political expression to such industrial action as can be pledged or prepared.

LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!

An open letter to Ken Livingstone

Strategy for the GLC against rate-capping

Dear Ken,

We need to be clear about what our strategy is to be over the next five months in constructing next year's GLC budget in combatting rate-capping.

What is the Objective?

My objective in this whole operation is quite simple, to do all I can to maintain the GLC firmly opposed to the government, protecting services and refusing to make cuts. In this way we can contribute to a united front of Labour and trade union opposition to defeat the government and to hasten its downfall. In addition it is crucial that in the long term we maintain the credibility of our administration as a major left socialist advance. We must pursue therefore a policy of non-compliance with government demands for cuts in services.

Can we survive by complying but without cuts?

Some soft left local authority leaders are examining the possibility of using creative accountancy measures in order to comply with the government and survive into next year without making cuts. Although in previous years I have juggled with the GLC's finances to maximise the resources available for growth in our programmes I am strongly opposed to attempts to cook our books to cling onto office for a limited period and for little purpose. If we seek to cling onto office in this way we will eventually be led into the drying up of resources to maintain existing or develop new policy areas and then into cuts in services. We would have submitted to rate-capping and the government would have effectively gained direct control over us.

The whole point of our administration is that we are a challenge to the central capitalist state. To accommodate at this crucial stage would be to accept without challenge our subservience to Tory class rule.

In addition, in my view, to cling onto office by means of creative accountancy at this stage will be seen as an act of betrayal by us, leaving the boroughs isolated and vulnerable to being picket off by the government. The whole strategy of opposition to rate-capping supported publicly by ourselves, Ted Knight and other comrades has been to maintain a united front of non-compliance thus bringing about a crisis for the government faced with 6-10 rebellious local authorities. If we are seen to be acquiescing at the first point of conflict it will be a massive blow to the confidence of comrades in the boroughs. We must push the GLC into joining forces with them. For us to be able to use financial devices to stay in office it would necessitate the government turning a blind eye to these manoeuvres. The obvious motive for the government's complicity would be to divide us from our borough comrades and thus enabling Jenkin to put down easily the borough revolt.

The effect of a defeated, acquiescent GLC on the morale of the left in the long term is also an important consideration for me. We will undermine the confidence placed in us by hundreds of thousands of socialists throughout the country if we are seen to be capitulating to a Thatcherite government and breaking ranks with other socialist councils and ducking the fight with the government by cooking our books. It is the difference between our GLC being remembered as George Lansbury and Poplar or Marshall Petain and the Vichy government.

The balance of forces on the Labour Group.

The main problem in pursuing the policy of non-compliance with government demands for cuts is that we can expect some members of the GLC Labour Group to vote for cuts if faced with the threat of surcharge (exactly as they did on the fares issue). To ensure maximum support in the Group I will be laying motions at the Regional EC and proposing a standard resolution for CLPs endorsing non-compliance and asking those councillors not prepared to risk illegality to stand down to be replaced by a supporter of non-compliance. If the issue is not properly debated in the Party we will find that in late February or March when the crunch comes we will not have the clear understanding or support of even Party members let alone the public. The final decision within the Labour Group should also only be taken after there has been a consistent period of discussion within the Party and then a Party view arrived at to direct the action of Group members.

We can win.

I am confident that if the Party is fully involved we can hold the Labour Group firmly against cuts and in support of non-compliance. There are a range of tactical questions which the Party needs to discuss and on which the Party needs to mandate the GLC Labour Group. For example, the question of whether we fix a rate, (I support the refusal to fix a rate); whether we withhold debt charges to the banks (I consider this the best means of hitting the Tories where it hurts them most), how we mobilise the trade union movement more effectively (this has been a weakness of all previous campaigns).

The next five months is so crucial for us and the labour movement generally I felt it important to set out clearly the line I will be following so that even if there are differences between comrades they'll at least understand why.

Ralph Miliband's latest book "Capitalist Democracy in Britain" usefully describes how the political system is used effectively to suppress working class power and to ensure the survival of capitalist domination both by repression but also, more typically in the case of Britain, by absorbing class pressure and conflict. Local government has traditionally been part of the state mechanism for incorporating and thus defeating class challenges to capital. I feel that we have effectively used our administration to mobilise, strengthen and increase the confidence of both our Party and our class in combatting capital, opening up local government as a terrain of class struggle. We have been successful both in and against the State. We must not falter at this vital stage in the struggle.

Yours

John McDonnell
Deputy Leader of the GLC

ALL OUT NOVEMBER 7th

The Democracy for London Campaign (DFL) was formed in mid 1983 as a result of the Tories' manifesto pledge to abolish the GLC. The GLC/ILEA (non teaching) unions of which there are 16, decided for the first time to unite and initiate a campaign committee.

The Campaign committee has organised a number of events over the past 15 months including the 24th January strike with the Save ILEA Campaign. This day closed most GLC departments and ILEA schools and attracted over 20,000 people to march from Hyde Park to Jubilee Gardens.

Democracy day was a more 'qualified' success following so closely on the heels of January 24th as it did, but again many GLC/ILEA workers struck for the day.

The DFL has organised a number of mass shop steward conferences and produced a limited numbers of newsletters and leaflets. The DFL has also joined with SERTUC and GLATC to provide a briefing pack on the effects of abolition and rate-capping which is proving most useful and is available from DFL at a price of 60p (approx).

The campaign to assert the role of the GLC and challenge the undemocratic measures of the Tory government has largely gone on with DFL supporting in principle, but with little active participation, because it has been a propaganda and publicity exercise aimed at Peers and MPs.

THE NEXT PHASE

The next phase of the campaign, however, will be concentrating on jobs and services and in this, DFL's role must be central. Equally the policy has been to initiate the setting up of Joint Shop Stewards Committees, department by department and area by area. The JSSCs will be able to control the direction of the campaign and encourage rank and file members to participate more fully.

Also DFL is trying to spread the fight into the broader Labour movement and community, by explaining the knock-on effect on jobs and the deterioration of services.

DFL therefore has set itself the task of activating the GLC workforce out of its complacency by reminding members that:

(a) There will be few transfers to the London boroughs.
(b) Privatisation will be rampant.
(c) Direct Secretary of State financial control of joint boards will mean cuts.
(d) There will be no 'golden handshakes' and the jobs aren't for sale anyway.

JOINT CAMPAIGN

We have also taken on board the fight against Rate-capping and have joined with the London Bridge Committee to organise a joint campaign. (London Bridge Committee is the coordinating body for the Joint Union Campaign in the rate-cap hit list London Boroughs.)

At the moment DFL is building for a major stoppage and rally on November 7th. This will be the start of the campaign against the Tories final assault on the GLC and their attempt to introduce rate capping cuts.

November 7th is the date when local government workers must begin to draw together to build an effective fighting campaign. We cannot await the TUC's proposed re-run of Democracy Day as it will be too little and too late.

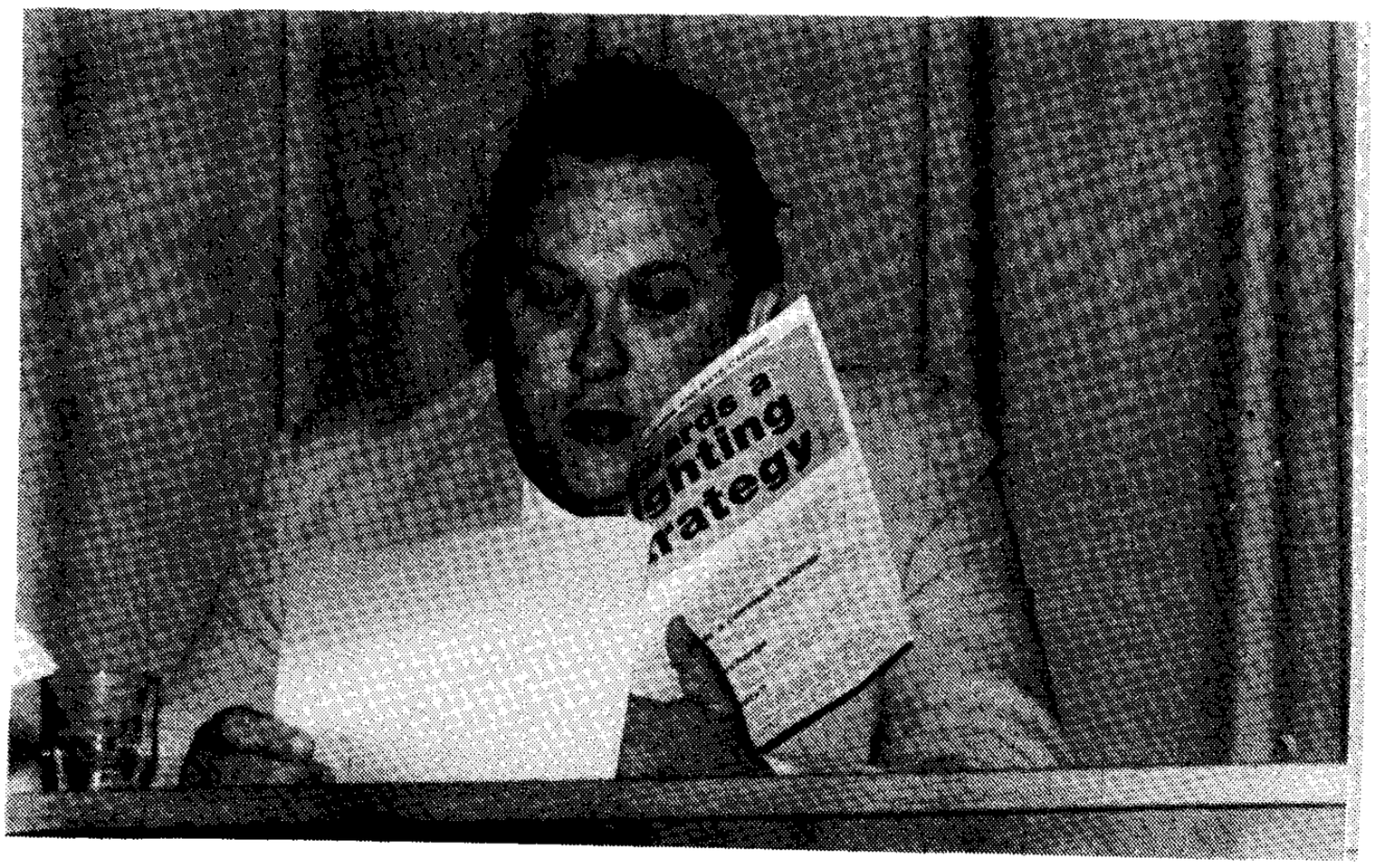
HIT LIST: SOUTHWARK RESPONSE

As the implementation of rate-capping gets nearer many people in the Labour Parties in Southwark are becoming increasingly concerned at the strategy of Not Fixing A Rate adopted by the Labour Group and LGC.

Briefing readers will be aware of the arguments against such a strategy. What has caused as much concern in Southwark is the way the decision has been arrived at. A paper, 'Towards a Common Strategy', by leader Tony Ritchie was brought back from the Sheffield Conference on ratecapping, agreed by the Labour Group and then pushed through the LGC 'as a basis for discussion' with only one speech allowed against, but with the promise of a Local Government Committee Conference on the issue, open to all members, as a sweetener.

WE WON'T LISTEN IF WE DON'T AGREE

When this LGC conference arrived its status as 'merely a consultative exercise' was stressed and its format was very suggestive of a rubber-stamping exercise. Despite being open to all party members it was not widely advertised and no Council union speakers were invited. The speakers on the platform were Tony Ritchie and Ted Knight, both Not-Fixing-A-Rate advocates. Despite this, the conference voted to reject this option and instead called for the adoption of a '3 noes/Deficit Budget' strategy, after an occasionally bizarre debate during which comrades Knight and Ritchie attempted to characterise deficit budgetting as a 'soft option'. Overall the standard of debate was high, however, and the non-viability of Not-Fixing-A-Rate as a fighting strategy was highlighted time and time again. Party members felt it was impossible to take such an unclear and ambiguous strategy out into the community and win people to it.



John Chapman

Southwark Council leader Tony Ritchie investigates 'Towards a Fighting Strategy', Peckham LPYS's leaflet supporting '3 noes'.

The leadership's response to the conference decision appears to be to ignore it and carry on exactly as before. Emergency motions supporting the 3 noes strategy are now being taken to wards, but the situation does not look hopeful. No serious action to involve the local community in building an effective campaign against rate-capping appears to have been taken. Indeed the Council ignoring tenants' demands and attacking those at the butt-end of Tory cuts – namely squatters. The possibility of building genuine unity with the community in a fight against the government is therefore being sacrificed for the sake of maintaining unity between the leaderships of hit-list authorities.

THE WAY FORWARD

The only way out of this situation seems to be for the parties in other boroughs to demand that their councils adopt 3-no's strategies. If a groundswell of popular support for this option can be created it may be possible to swing authorities like Southwark round. It would I think be better to have even a minority of hit-list councils seriously fighting the Tories than to have total unity on a weak strategy which will allow the government to characterise Labour Councils as high-rating and force them into selling out.

As far as Southwark goes, apart from the need for the Left to stop licking its wounds and start organising itself properly again, it's time the Council leadership and LGC were reminded of party democracy and the fact that policy is supposed to grow from the grass roots, not be imposed from on high by our 'wise leaders'.

Chris Bright
Faraday Ward, Peckham CLP

November 7th is tactically and strategically correct. Support local government workers, join the action, join the rally.

Jimmi Fitzpatrick
Secretary, DFL

It is hoped that all major public sector unions in the GLC/ILEA and London Boroughs will join the Day of Action. Make sure your union is there.

STRIKE AND RALLY

NOVEMBER 7TH

AGAINST ABOLITION AND RATECAPPING

DEFEND JOBS AND SERVICES

ASSEMBLE 11am Burgess Park
MARCH to Jubilee Gardens
RALLY 2pm Festival Hall

DEFEND THE GLC

Did you know that. . .

- The Government plans to abolish the GLC
- The Government has cancelled your democratic elections to the GLC
- The Government plans to give the GLC services to unelected Boards and civil servants
- The Government plans to cut GLC services.
- The Government will introduce the main abolition bill in the coming session of Parliament.

WHOSE LONDON IS IT ANYWAY?
JOIN THE LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT

THURSDAY 8th NOVEMBER
Central Hall, Westminster
2.30 to 7.00pm

Tell *your* MP what you think of these crazy plans.

PENSIONERS: Will be given lunch at County Hall from 12.30 and given transport to the Lobby.
WOMEN will be provided with a creche so that they can join a special women's lobby between 2.30 and 3.30. There will also be a women's rally at Central Hall, Westminster from 2.30.
RING 633 4400 for further details.

VITAL BY-ELECTION, Thursday October 25.
Last Chance to vote against Rate-Capping.
By-election in St. George's Ward, Tufnell Park.
Committee Room: 60 Crayford Road, N7.
Tel: 607-/887.
Candidate – Peter Rees.
Agent – Keith Veness
Committee Rooms on election day:
60 Crayford Road, N7.
20 Penderyn Way, N7.
22 Dalmeny Road, N7.
Canvassing: 6.30 pm Mon-Fri.
10.30 am Sundays.

STANDING WITH THE MINERS

By Chris Lent (Streatham CLP)

On 19 August, five members of Streatham Labour Party went on a delegation to the striking miners of Nottinghamshire. We are writing this article to urge members of other groups and organisations to do the same.

Along with many Londoners, we've spent the last 25 weeks collecting on the streets, organising public meetings, giving food and money. But after attending the women's march and rally on 11 August, and talking to miners at ward meetings (who told us that Nottinghamshire Labour Councillors were crossing picket lines), some of us decided that money alone is not enough.

Nottinghamshire is perhaps most in need of outside support because the striking miners are a beleaguered minority — some 2,000 against 14,000 scabs. Like any community suddenly divided, the people are in a state of shock. But for the strikers at least, that sense is deepened by the treatment they face at the hands of the police.



Sydney Richmond

Above: A small police snatch squad made up of members of the Notts and Gloucestershire constabularies. Minutes later they had pounced into the crowd of pickets and dragged someone away – apparently for no reason.
Below: Ollerton. Strikers' children in the soup kitchen at Whinney Road. This is where your money is going!



OUTRAGEOUS

The police operation in Nottinghamshire is outrageous. It could almost be Belfast; it could easily be Brixton. And among local people the connections *are* being made. By oppressing a community whose roots lie deep within the 'respectable' white working class, the police have radicalised the miners to an impressive degree. NCB-owned cottages are now festooned with 'Stop the Police State' posters. Women go on picket lines and marches, swapping their 'traditional' roles with the men who stay at home and look after the kids. A 'Mines Not Missiles' march (20 arrests) led by Greenham Common Women arrived in Mansfield from Liverpool while we were there. But this process of politicisation cannot and will not last without support from outside. The pressures of tradition are too great. Despite the activism of the women, for example, it is they who are left to run the soup kitchens.

We stayed in small village 7 miles east of Junction 27 of the M1 called Blidworth. The colliery dominates the centre with small houses laid out around it in grids. Only half the miners are on strike, which means that in their company you are barred from certain pubs and shops, shunned in the streets and occasionally abused. The strikers are denied access to the local NUM welfare centre and have to meet in a community hall next to the colliery. Police officers patrol outside and scrutinise us as we eat our morning baked beans on toast. If there is any intimidation in Blidworth, it is the strikers and their families who suffer it.

The village is most famous for the 'siege of Blidworth'. On 14 May, police broke into homes and forced their way into back gardens in Thorney Abbey Road in order to arrest Yorkshire picket leader Terry Dunn and others who were staying there. Seventy police vans and 1,000 officers then remained in the streets all night harassing residents over the loss of one police torch!

Things have been pretty quiet in Blidworth since then. Picketing is small and informal, with little shouting and only the occasional wry joke or ebuke as the scabs go unhappily into work. At least they do not look proud to be crossing the picket line.

It's hard work being on strike. The morning shift at the colliery starts at 6 am. The pickets are there by 5, and stay until 6.30. We then back to watch Breakfast TV until the strike centre opens at around 7.30 am. If you don't think the media is biased you should watch Nick Ross and Selina Scott in a front room in Blidworth. It's not just the glee with which they report the so-called 'drift back to work'; or the vocabulary they use to describe the violence in Yorkshire. Their whole manner and style of presentation belies a huge gulf in social and ethical values between them and the people whose

Brent Miners' Support Group

Support for the miners in Brent is as strong as ever. So far nearly £74,000 has been collected in the area — the highest in London. Further fund-raising activities are underway including an auction and a bonfire benefit, both organised by Brent South Labour Party. Money is being collected regularly at workplaces and union meetings. Food convoys are sent to Kent every month. Every Saturday morning groups of supporters collect in all the major shopping centres in Brent.

The recent harassment and arrests of street collectors has led to protests from all sections of the labour movement and an uneasy truce has been negotiated between the police and the miners' support group. The police will allow us to collect if we restrict our numbers, have lids on our buckets, do not rattle out tins and 'sell' *The Miner* instead of just asking for donations. Plain clothes police are known to be watching us. In the meantime the court cases of those arrested have been adjourned till a later date. At Cllr Graham Durham's hearing on 8 October, a request was made by his solicitor to have the £36 returned that was in Graham's collecting bucket at the time of his arrest. After much consultation among the two magistrates, the lawyers and the clerk of the court, with much reference to law books, the money was returned — but the police have been allowed to hang on to the bucket!

SWITCH ON AT SIX

The last two weeks in October will see workplace visits of delegations of black miners from Nottinghamshire and women's support group from Kent. Good links were established with the black miners during the Notting Hill Gate Carnival. Co-operation between the Trades Council and the Labour Parties in Brent in support of the miners continues — a fairly new venture in the area's history. Support committee meetings can sometimes get a bit heated but at least this means that political discussion does take place. Over the next period the support committee wants to highlight the 'Switch on at 6' campaign and to ensure that trade unionists do not co-operate with fuel saving schemes at work. Supporters from London are going down to picket lines in Kent every Monday.

There has been some concern raised in our Support Group (which is linked to the Kent area) about other areas coming onto 'our patch'. Hopefully this can be resolved in the near future, since it is really an internal NUM issue, but it has led to difficulties. It is hard to say no to miners who turn up at your GMC with heart-rending tales about their conditions. Miners and their families everywhere are facing appalling hardships but they are determined to fight on until they have won. That is why we have to give unconditional support to the miners. That is why the Labour Party must throw its full weight behind the strike.

Tessa van Gelderen
Brent South CLP

STANDING WITH THE MINERS (continued)

homes they have so smoothly entered.

The next shift comes on at around noon, with pickets assembling by 11.30 am. On our first day, we decided to go to Ollerton for the midday picket, 10 miles north of Blidworth. We had to pass through three police roadblocks to get there. They let us through — probably because we don't look much like miners. But we saw others being turned back. And far worse than that has happened.

Sidney Richmond is a 70 year old retired miner form Clipstone. He was stopped at a roadblock because he was wearing an NUM badge. When he refused to get out of his car, police dragged him out, hit him in the face, and handcuffed him so tightly that it aggravated the thrombosis he suffered in his wrists. He literally began sweating blood through the palms of his hands. When his son — who is not a miner — came to take him to hospital, he was arrested. Both men are now suing the police.

When we finally get to Ollerton, we visited the welfare centre, which is the unofficial HQ of the strike in Nottinghamshire. Here food parcels are distributed; meals provided; and a law centre, staffed by volunteers from the Haldane is busy five days a week.

DEFIANCE

The general mood is one of cheerful defiance. The miners are happy to meet visitors and anxious to talk. The main concern is for the children. School is starting soon and people report that they have been denied adequate clothing grants because they are on strike.

The next day we joined our first mass picket, at Mansfield colliery. You usually hear about these at very short notice through a strikers' grapevine. In a community where the majority are against you there is little room for trust. A sign at Blidworth reads: 'The walls have ears. So do the cops. Keep picket targets secret'.

The police find out about it soon enough, however. To avoid being stopped we had to park half a mile away, split up, and go through on foot.

The sheer scale of the police presence is the most nerve-racking aspect of a mass picket. We were herded together on a small patch of waste ground and completely surrounded. Once you've joined the picket, you are trapped. The police will not let you leave until *they* are ready. On this occasion they kept us for 1½ hours under a ferociously hot sun. After a small amount of pushing at one end of the picket, a squadron of police horses appeared from nowhere to reinforce the line.

The strikers are as scared as we are. No one is in any doubt as to what the police are capable of. No one is looking for trouble. They come because they believe in their cause, and because they believe they have a *right* to picket.

Bob Cooper is there. A Durham miner who moved to the Notts region 3 years ago in search of 'job security' — he laughs bitterly — he was badly beaten up by police at Orgreave: truncheoned on the head and knees; trampled by a police horse. He was back on the picket line the next day — on crutches and in a neck brace. Like Sidney Richmond, his is one of 12 writs issued against 2 Chief Constables on 20 August.

Above and behind us on an embankment stand a row of snatch squads, who dive in — apparently at random — to pull people out of the crowd. Just like fish in a barrel. There are three arrests on this picket. The casual display of violence by the police — a boot here, an elbow there — as they drag people away, is nothing short of appalling.

There have been over 5,000 arrests so far during the strike, mainly on the spurious charges of 'obstruction', 'threatening behaviour', 'breach of the peace' etc.

The intention behind the police strategy is plain: to harass and intimidate pickets; to take as many out of circulation as possible. People have been held in custody for hours, or even days, and then released without charge. There is even an 'NUM charge centre' specially set aside at Mansfield police station.

Those who come up before the magistrates are routinely placed under conditional bail until their cases are due to be heard. Conditions range from a simple prohibition of picketing, to curfews, to virtual house arrest. If you break these conditions, you are in danger of re-arrest and remand.

This has led to some ludicrous situations. One striker who was told not to visit the home of any working miner for the duration of the dispute, ended up camping in his own back garden because his father, who lives with him, is a working miner! Other people have been prevented by the police from taking their children to school because of the proximity of the colliery.

We were finally dispersed by the police shortly before one o'clock. We were marched away from the pit entrance like a large gang of prisoners. We went back to the welfare centre for lunch and spent the rest of the day talking to miners. The next morning, the routine began all over again.

It's not for us to say how much practical help our visit was. The strikers were undoubtedly pleased to see us. They took us into their homes. They shared their hopes and fears with us. They treated us as friends.

The position of the strikers is an unenviable one. They have been outlawed. Their sole 'crime' is that they object to an aspect of the government's industrial policy. But there is a growing awareness in Nottinghamshire that they are not alone in their plight. All over the country other groups are oppressed because they too are against various aspects of government policy: black people; the Catholic community of Northern Ireland; gay people; the Peace Movement.

Go up to Nottinghamshire. It's only 2 or 3 hours away. You could be making a major contribution to British democracy.

Greenwich backs the miners



Greenwich, now the closest Labour constituency to the Kent coalfields, has had strong connections with Kent miners since the 1974 strike. As soon as the present strike began it set up an office for the NUM in its Woolwich Road rooms, and stationed around 50 miners in party members' homes. It called a 1,000-strong demonstration in support of the strike, set up regular benefit concerts, and instituted the 50p levy even before the National Executive discussed it. Its weekly support committee meetings were established by the second month of the strike.

The Labour council, which also covers the constituencies of Woolwich and Eltham, was slower off the mark but has not taken a series of very important steps, which have galvanised a new round of activity to a great degree thanks to the hard and consistent work put in by the town hall trade unions, whose town hall support committee has met weekly for most of the strike. The council has agreed to put collection points in all council sites and has made a room available for use by the NUM.

On September 8th the council twinned with Easington Town Council in a public ceremony in Woolwich's main square, watched by a 1,000-strong crowd, most of whom had come on the Labour Party's march from Abbey Wood, and who included 70 Durham miners — with their colliery band — and about 50 Kent miners. Following the twinning, the council has seconded a full-time union appointee to its campaigns unit and established a regular liason commitee, attended by the council leader, which links up all the various support activities in the borough and co-ordinates them with council's work.

This is not to say there haven't been problems. A small number of hard-working activists have tended to leave the majority of party members to come to demos and dance at bops as their 'contribution', while street collections have been patchy and irregular, the most consistent collections being organised by the Communist Party. In some areas Labour Party 'street presences' have discretely refrained from publicising the miners' case or collecting for them.

If those concerned are worried that association with the miners could damage the party's standing, they should take a look at the recent council by-election result on the Ferrier Estate, where local candidate Serena Lovelace trounced the SDP's aspiring parliamentary candidate Bill Ford by 800 to 500. Over the last six months Greenwich's wards have grown by between ten and fifty per cent, and the CLP is already within reach of Walworth Road's 1984 membership drive target — even before launching its drive.

Nevertheless it will be vital to extend the numbers *actively* involved in collections, and also to take political initiatives against the criminalisation of the miners and the legal attacks on them, to play an adequate part in winning the strike. The recently-formed Greenwich Briefing has taken two useful steps. It has established a Women Against Pit Closures group, which is taking some 40 women down to meet Aylesham women on 18 October. And the most recent Briefing meeting heard Martin Walker, a co-author of 'State of Siege' (published and financed by Greenwich NALGO) and a council worker with Greenwich's Police Committee, talk on the role of the police in the strike. Of particular concern is the use of Greenwich peninsular area as a London-wide training ground for police training in riot tactics including, it is rumoured, banned anti-riot devices.

Greenwich borough's labour movement is well placed to face this challenge. Let us hope its elected representatives have the courage to do so.

LEWISHAM EAST ON "WAR FOOTING"

Lewisham East Constituency Labour Party has recognised that we are in a class war situation, and has responded by putting itself on a kind of 'war footing' where action on the miners is concerned. An appalling situation of paralysis, crossed lines, and committee-itis had led to 14 miners stationed in the Town Hall being left isolated and alone to try to cope – with little success – with the obstructive attitudes of the Town Hall bureaucracy. To cut a long story short, we resolved to cut through all the red tape. At our General Management Committee meeting on October 5th, we elected a single individual to act as the custodian of the GC's authority with full powers of instruction (consistent with the mandating structure of the Labour Party) to ensure that the miners' demands were met. A single member of the Labour Group was likewise appointed to convey to Group any instructions received from the three CLPs or from the Borough Local Government Committee.

Chris Knight, (Lewisham East CLP.)

Brent South CLP Miners' levy

SINCE we started our levy at the beginning of May we have raised over £3,300. Most of this has been raised through members, the rest through fund raising events such as jumble sales, barbecues and raffles. We have a major event on 3rd November taking place at the New Hall, Union Road, Wembley, Middlesex at 3 pm. This will be a public auction of Labour Party interest, NUM items and quality general interest items such as a photographic enlarger. Viewing will start at 1 pm, all proceeds will go to the NUM. If anyone has any items to donate please ring either myself on 452 4553 or Penny Witham on 965 2964. The more items donated will mean more money for the NUM. Don't forget to come to the Sale!

Peter Batkin,

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LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

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Housing Peace Camp In Southwark

"FIGHT THE TORIES, NOT THE HOMELESS!' demanded the Housing Peace Camp which sprang into action on Southwark Town Hall lawn and TV screens on Oct 8-12th.

The week-long round the clock initiative was organised by the Tenants And Squatters Campaign of Southwark to counter the hysterical squat-bashing campaign being conducted by South London Press, Hughes Liberal MP for Bermondsey and sections of the Council; and to stop the Council leadership's plan to bring in the iniquitious "PIO" procedure of the Criminal Law Act 1977 (known as the 'Criminal respass Law') against homeless people who have to squat.

TENANTS BACKING

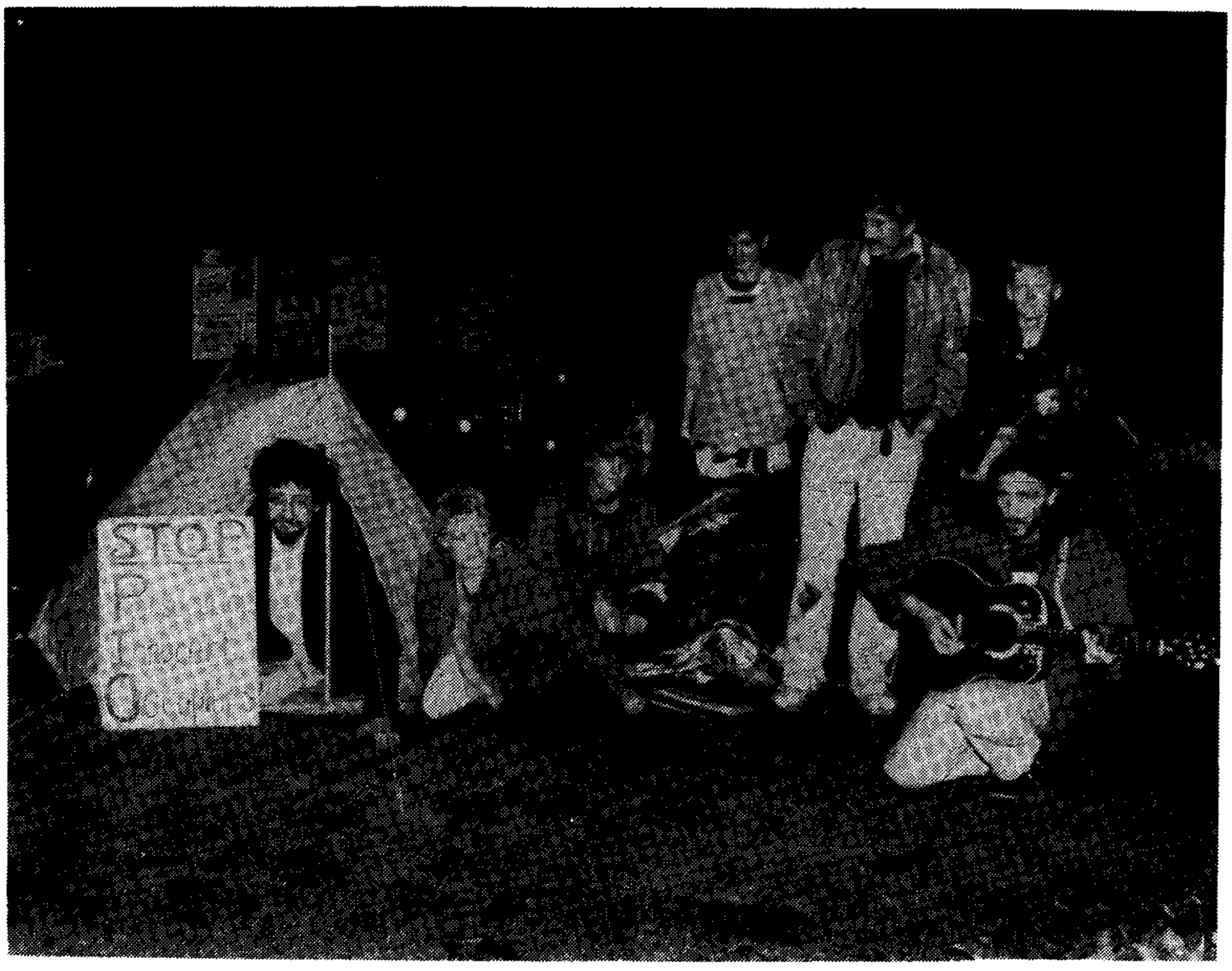
The camp was actively backed by two of the tenants representatives on the Housing Committee as well as many active tenants, squatters and Labour Party members. Passing tenants eagerly signed the petition opposing use of 'PIOs', and calling for the reintroduction of 'Hard-to-let' scheme whereby older properties are rented out more easily and many squatters would get tenancies.

Southwark has more empty properties than any other Borough. For tenants empty property is a more important issue than squatting.

LIES EXPOSED

Housing Peace Camp leaflets exposed the recent media/Council/Hughes bogey story of a family who supposedly squatted in a flat allocated to someone else. The TRUTH is the Council sent round a supposed intending occupier two weeks after the flat had been occupied by a family running from a violent husband who had first checked with the Council that no-one had agreed to move in..

However after a heated debate the Labour Group voted on Wed 10th to criminalise the homeless by introducing the Criminal Trespass Law. This is despite the fact it has been opposed by the Labour movement since its inception and despite the fact that it can only be used against the vast majority of squats in an illegal way by the creation of bogus 'PIOs' and their creation has already been exposed in a number of instances. PIO is meant to stand for Protected Intending Occupier but in practice it means PERSECUTION OF INNOCENT OCCUPIERS.



John Chapman

The Housing Peace Camp starting up. Police and Town Hall officials threatened intervention but backed off when 'campers' advised they were a land squat like Greenham Common and a High Court order 113 was needed to remove them. One of their number, a Greenham woman reinforced this point.

The concept of the PIO law was created to create divisions between all of those who are in need of better housing and to enable those who take direct action over housing to be scapegoated. Its practical use need only amount to verbal threats of police intervention to terrorise people out of their homes.

UNITY AGAINST THE TORIES

If Southwark is going to fight the Tories it must unite all deprived groups, not attack them. However the Council seems unwilling or unable to tackle the borough's housing problems: empty property, poor repairs and allocations system and a bureaucratic and unresponsive housing department; and instead is bashing squatters as a supposedly popular measure. This will NOT encourage a fight against the Tories and will NOT help in the next Council elections.

Fight the hatemongers not the hate objects! Fight the real criminals in our society, don't criminalise the homeless! **Fight the Tories not the Homeless.**

Piers Corbyn, Bermondsey CLP
and a tenants rep on
Southwark Housing Committee

Westminster Council Housing Under Threat

Tory controlled Westminster City Council plans to deal with its housing crisis by selling off its best blocks of council flats to private developers. Probing by Labour councillors on the housing committee forced the Tories to divulge the scheme somewhat prematurely.

The first development under threat is Wellesley House on the Ebury Bridge Estate, but more are to follow. Already private property speculators have been spotted in the area sniffing out the possibilities of quick profits for themselves and their fellows in the City of London. No doubt the Westminster City Tories can look forward to handsome donations from its grateful supporters among property sharks.

Meanwhile other council properties are being left to rot because the Tories refuse to spend money on proper repair and maintenance on those estates which are of no interest to private developers. No new council houses are being built and the waiting list, already at 20,000, continues to grow. Few, if any, of those on the list will ever be housed. The situation is desperate.

WESTMINSTER LABOUR COUNCILLORS

The Westminster Labour Councillors are trying to organise a fight back. A campaign has been launched against the Tory plans. One meeting has already been held and others are planned to alert the voters of Westminster to the danger. Meanwhile the tenants are being helped to organise against the threat to their homes and the local government unions are being mobilised to help in the fight.

The only positive side to the housing catastrophe in Westminster is the ammunition it provides for the local Labour parties in their fight to drive Lady Porter and her neanderthal Thatcherites into the wilderness at the next local government elections and the political experience the threatened tenants are gaining in organising themselves to resist the privatisation of their homes.

Paula Watson

Problems on the London Executive

'For a couple of hours on Monday afternoon, Labour became a working class party', was how one political observer described the debate on the miners' strike at Annual Conference.

From the Monday Club to the RCP, no-one has any doubts that the miners' strike is the single most important thing happening in Britain today. All other struggles have become dependent upon its outcome. If the miners lose, the fight against ratecapping and the abolition of the GLC and metropolitan counties will be that much harder. If the miners lose, organising opposition to Tory trade union legislation and the attacks on the political levy will be a massive task. Yet the agenda for a meeting of the London Labour Party's Campaign Committee less than a week after Conference manages to make no mention of the strike.



Tessa Howland (IFL)

LEFT IN A MAJORITY

The left has been in a majority on the Greater London Regional Council (GLRC) for a number of years. It has achieved much, particularly through its control of the GLC. But when asked to write on what the left can achieve at a regional level those past achievements have to be weighed against the present and the question is unavoidable: why has the GLRC not led the way in building solidarity for the miners in London?

In writing this I am conscious that what I write is very London-centric and that, while London is looked to by many on the left (the ones not looking to Liverpool), it is very different to other Labour Party regions and the tasks and traps facing the left in London may not be the same elsewhere. With the possible exceptions of Scotland and Wales, London is the only region which has a clear identity, a specific constituency and a major council – the GLC – to carry out its policies. It has major communications and transport advantages over other regions and organising region-wide initiatives is relatively easy.

Yet during the miners' strike the left has backed away from using the Party's regional structure to forge solidarity. The GLRC has been used solely as a sounding board and mailing list for activities taking place elsewhere. At the beginning of the strike, major rallies were organising in north and south London – the GLRC supported them, but in name only. CLPs have organised demonstrations, collections, socials. London borough councils have twinned with mining villages, provided hospitality, opened up their libraries and town halls as food collection points. The GLC has raised money in all sorts of imaginative ways and provided a variety of facilities. London trade unions have raised thousands of pounds; trade union resource centres have lived up to their name; and even the South East Region TUC has ground its cumbersome bureaucracy into activity. Yet comrades who have been leading these activities in every other political arena have not used the GLRC as an organising body. A couple of bulletins have been produced, exhorting CLPs to collect the levy – but very little else has been done.

ABDICATE RESPONSIBILITY

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee argue that the regions need an organisational upheaval before they can become campaigning bodies; most of their proposals for organisational change make sense – regional organisers are not campaigners, their job is to win elections and police the CLPs. But the very real problems of the organisation at regional level are no excuse for the left on the Executive appearing to abdicate responsibility for attempting to force that body into action.

During the brief six months I have been on the Regional Executive, the GLLP has fought the Euro-elections and four GLC by-elections, it has discussed at length strategies for councils fighting ratecapping and manifestos for the next GLC elections when the fight against abolition is won. At one level it looks as though it is doing a good job. But a close look at that list also shows its limitations – its main concerns are fighting elections and local government. If other aspects of the class struggle don't fit into these categories, they get squeezed out.

Whilst much of that squeezing out is done by the regional staff, I believe the left must take responsibility for having allowed the GLRC to adopt such a limited role. Over the past four years, the GLC has become the key focus for activity. The left is rightly proud of what it had been able to achieve. But in focussing on the GLC, the left has lost sight of what else needs to be done. It may be easier to get GLC officers rather than regional staff to implement policies, but this has led to the GLC Labour Group becoming a substitute for the London Labour Party. The miners' strike has exposed the political shortcuts which have been taken. The GLC has won the support of 74% of Londoners; but what percentage of support for the miners has the GLC won?

My thoughts on the limitations of the left on the Regional Executive in relation to the miners clarified themselves at its last meeting. Two motions were on the agenda. One called for a delegation to join picket lines in Nottinghamshire – the debate was desultory and, while a few volunteered to join the delegation, there was no real feeling that the motion would produce the desired effect of galvanising the Executive into action. The debate was not used as a focus for other ideas for activity to be thrown up.

WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

The second motion led to a much more heated debate for two reasons. Firstly, because the General Secretary thought it was asking the GLRC to actually *do* something, and, secondly, because it came from the Women's Committee. We are organising a major benefit concert for the miners and using it as a focus for organising Women's Sections' activities. It is the only event in support of the miners which has been organised in the name of the London Labour Party. We asked the GLRC to support it. Panic set in. Where's the money coming from? Who's doing the work? What if it flops? The implications were clear – a bunch of women had dreamt up a madcap scheme and were forcing

Defending London's Education, Reject All Cuts!

Everyone concerned with London's education realised that this year is the crucial one for its continued existence as we have known it. Therefore the basis from which we should start any campaign is the need to create unity amongst the elected members, its workers, and the users of the service.

However, there seems to be an acceptance from the leadership in County Hall that the government can and will manage to defeat any campaign which the trade union and labour movement organises to defend jobs and services in London. This comes across initially in the ILEA Budget 1985-6 Consultation document, where the underlying theme is how can we make cuts with the least possible effect on the service.

Of course there are some worthy statements contained in the document such as 'We believe the quality of London's education needs improving' or 'This (£75m) is a substantial reduction and it could not be achieved without affecting schools, colleges and youth, careers and adult education services . . .'

However, what are the alternatives put forward for us to consider? *Option A* — Compliance with government expenditure level — a cut of £75 million. *Option B* — A budget agreed by the ILEA — which includes new developments and some cuts, indicated in Annex B of the document by one and two asterisks. The cuts indicated in Option B total in excess of £9m and would result in a loss of 714 full time equivalent jobs.

The Authority says that the new developments outlined in Annex A may offset the job losses in Annex B. However, a study of the areas for new development do not correspond with the areas to be cut, and still could involve job losses of over 500. This could have the effect of creating disunity between one trade union and another — one group fighting loss of jobs and deteriorating conditions, with another group of workers seeing the possibility of an increase in their sector.



Stefano Cagnoni (IFL)

FATAL SPLIT

More importantly however, it will create a fatal split between the unions and the Authority. Such a development would be absolutely fatal to the whole campaign to defend education in London. The ILEA Labour Group must reject *any* cuts — there is no point in making 'a saving of a less serious nature' in order to appear 'responsible'. The Tories couldn't care less. Ken Livingstone said at an election organised by Westminster NUT that he would vote for a 'no cuts budget' even of this were deemed illegal.

The NUT is not alone in making it clear that they are opposed to cuts of any kind and are prepared to fight alongside the Authority on a no-cuts position. The trade unions involved in the 'Save the ILEA Campaign' are organising a strike on 7th November — the Labour Group have not yet made clear their attitude to this call, but are organising for a lobby of Parliament on 8th November. Are we going down different paths?

The Inner London Teachers Association (NUT) have written to Constituency Labour Parties and the ILEA members outlining our position on the Budget. We hope that our request to speak to wards and CLPs will be taken up and give us the opportunity to put our case.

Carole Regan
Inner London Teachers Association

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the London Labour Party into action.

The Executive divided into its component parts – the trade unions, worried about money and political funds, they'd given everything to the miners already, the London LP was not the channel they were using – the male left, staring at their hands, pretending not to be there – and the women, who increasingly have been using the Women's Committee as their uniting focus, regardless of whether their position on the Executive is from the women's sections, the CLPs or the trade unions. When it came down to it the left had been unable to take on a unifying role across all sections of the Executive. If the trade union section did not wish to use the Party to organise around a trade union issue, other areas – like the GLC, which could relate to SERTUC on an institutional level – could be used. But this meant that those of us on the Executive who were not councillors or trade union bosses (ie. most of the women) were left unsupported.

The London left has fallen into two traps. It has assumed that it can use control of the GLC and a number of London boroughs as a substitute for organising the London Labour Party; and, while assuming it controls the Regional Executive, it has failed to attempt to make inroads into the trade union section. Thus when we are confronted with a major industrial dispute, the left has used many of the forums it controls but at the level where it has the strongest interaction with the London trade union movement, it has left it to the industrial wing of the Party, which in turn is concentrating on trade union structures, not the Party. Women tend to be less bound by tradition and political niceties. Those of us on the Executive tend to have fewer other forums we control (unlike the men), and we saw no reason why we shouldn't organise solidarity at a regional level and demand *all* sections of the Party support our actions. And as a consequence the limitations of the left – the male left – stood revealed.

What is ironic is that the NUM is far less hesitant about breaking down the separation of political and industrial. They did not hesitate in giving support at Conference to Black Sections and the demands of the women's organisation, unlike a leading London trade unionist who saw these as marginal diversions from 'organising the left' and whose union then supported the right wing in the Women's Section of the NEC.

The miners' strike has revealed that the left in London still has a long way to go – it has to stop concentrating on electoralism and local government; it has to start breaking down the separation of the industrial and political wings of the movement and stop organising in just one of those wings; and it has to stop assuming (still) that the left (and the working class) is male, white and heterosexual. Women are organised on the Executive, the 'left' as a whole is not.

Of course, one of the strengths of the London left is that it recognises most of these problems. The GLC's record of support for women, black people and lesbians and gays is second to none. The energy that has had to be put into the fight to save the GLC has, unsurprisingly, restricted work in other areas. And, let's face it, doing things in the name of the London Labour Party carries little weight compared with other forums that can be used.

However, the GLRC and the other regional councils should carry weight and bring together all sections of the movement and the left's task must be to ensure that they do. We cannot afford not to provide leadership within the Party at every level, and that leadership is all the more desperately needed as the class struggle moves into centre stage.

Joan Twelves

THE ISSUE IS SERVICES—NOT SURCHARGE

In the impending local government confrontation it is the socialist councillors in the rate capped Boroughs who are seen as providing the opposition to the Government. It is vital, if the conflict is to be won, that the emphasis of the opposition to the Government's proposals is switched away from the councillors to the communities in the affected Boroughs.

When Liverpool faced up the Government, earlier this year, the media attention, was focussed on the internal machinations within the Council. Much discussion also revolved around the possibility of the councillors being surcharged. When a settlement was reached the analysis of the outcome was almost entirely related to how well the councillors had done in bringing about a climbdown by the Government (albeit a limited one). The fact that the settlement still meant the community in Liverpool suffered through reduced living standards because of large increases in the rents and rates and through lost job opportunities raised hardly a mention.

I am not making this point to criticise the Liverpool Labour Group; indeed on the contrary I believe it was their stand that has enabled there to be such unity in support of confrontation now. The lesson to be learnt is that where the battle is simply between the Government and Labour councillors it is the councillors who decide when the terms are right for a settlement. Those terms may not be so acceptable to those in the community who face the consequences.

Imagine the following scenario. In my own Borough, Lewisham, we need in the region of £8m more from the Government in the form of Rate Support Grant if we are to meet the costs of our no cuts budget, without any rent increase. If we were to adopt the Government's expenditure limit we would have to cut our budget by 15%, including 1,000 job losses. Say our Labour Group refused to make a rate in March 1985 and then in early June, the Government offered £5m in additional RSG. It would take a brave person to bet that a majority of the Labour Group, facing the prospect of surcharge and bankruptcy on the one hand, as against a major victory against the Government and only having to implement 7% worth of cuts on the other, would vote in favour of continuing fight.

What is missing from this scenario is the people who would have to face the impact of 7% cuts, including perhaps 2/300 job losses and rent increases of £2/3.

The aim of rate capping is to cut the level of services and the number of jobs. It is the community that is in the firing line. The quirk that has allowed the councillors to face the possiblity of surcharge should not blind them to the fact that it is the community that is under attack and not them personally.

Why have the leaders of the local government unions, voluntary sector and tenants movement not taken a more prominent stance in the confrontation? Primarily they are suspicious of the commitment of councillors who over the past few years, have voted through major rent and rate rises and even some cuts. These suspicions are hardly being allowed by councils whose main strategy is based upon the principle of not setting a rate without discussing under what circumstances they would make a rate. The issue cannot be left hanging in the air, or once again the final decision of what is and what is not acceptable is left solely in the councillors hands.

In a number of Boroughs the Unions have asked the Labour Group for a commitment that they will not cut jobs. It is up to the Borough Labour Parties and the left members on each Group to ensure that the pledge is given. Similar pledges should also be given saying the Labour Group will not cut services or raise the rates or rents. Giving such a commitment councillors would not only be moving the emphasis away from the issue of surcharge to the issue of services, but would also be developing a bond between the community and socialist councillors to the extent that it puts both the community and their representatives at risk and each needs the others full support if the conflict is to be won.

If the Lewisham Labour Group gave these pledges the likely outcome of the scenario, described above, could be very different.

When considering the offer from the Government, the Group would know that to accept the offer would not only mean job losses, cuts and rent increases but it would also mean that they had broken the bond between themselves and the community which could result in the community refusing to cooperate with the Council by striking, refusing to pay rent, etc.

The Group would have to liaise with the representatives of the community to discuss whether the offer would be acceptable. Both the Group and the representatives would have a number of counterveiling pressures to consider but it would certainly ensure that the issue of preserving jobs, services and the living standards of the community was the item at the top of the agenda.

Winning this confrontation with the Government can only by measured in terms of preserving the level of services and jobs, without reducing the living standards of the community. I do not believe that can be achieved unless it is the community that is seen as being under threat and not individual councillors. It is up to us to ensure that the community feels this is their conflict and that any victory is their victory.

Martyn Day
(Chair of Lewisham Local Government Committee)

Next London Editorial Board is at 6.30 pm, Monday November 26 at County Hall..

Deadline for articles, Monday November 12. All articles to be sent to 54 Bow Road, London E3.

'Women in Politics' by Paula Watson and Vidya Anand. Cost 60p per copy from 54 Bow Road, London E3.

Liberals and police in cover-up

The new Alliance Council in Richmond and the Police have been involved in an elaborate cover-up of a civil liberties case involving a black man who was arrested twice in 24 hours, detained over-night without charge, and strip searched. His 15-month old daughter was taken from his wife and kept overnight in hospital by social workers.

The 'Bretagne Case' has become the most controversial civil liberties case in the brief life of Greater London's only Alliance Council and makes a nonsense of their 1982 Manifesto pledge which reads as follows: 'The Alliance believes that secrecy breeds suspicion. That is bad for democracy . . . Liberals and Social Democrats will expose council activities to full public scrutiny.'

Andre Bretagne, a black French national, was arrested by Richmond Police on the allegation that he had indecently assaulted two boys in Richmond. After being strip-searched and given a rectal examination he was released by the police who told him they had made a mistake.

Meanwhile his British wife Christine was told that if she did not co-operate with the police her 15-month daughter would be taken into care. A police doctor examined a bruise on the child's forehead and said there was nothing wrong with the child. Two hours later at the Bretagnes basement home two social workers and three policemen arrived. They produced a Place of Safety Order and demanded that the child be taken to a hospital. Mr Bretagne was arrested for breach of the peace in his own bedroom. In the struggle the police broke part of the bannister.

The following day the child was released from the hospital and the doctors confirmed that the bruise was consistent with the mother's story that she had fallen off a swing. Mr Bretagne was kept in the police cells overnight and the next day was bound over to keep the peace for six months. He has a very limited understanding of English.

When the story broke in the local newspapers two plain clothes policemen called to see Mr Bretagne to ask him 'why are you victimising the police?'. An official complaint was made to the police but although the police agreed to give an apology this was subsequently retracted. The Alliance Council was pressed to hold an inquiry but refused. The Council Leader declined to meet the parents, instead, as he later admitted, preferring to read the newspaper reports rather than hearing their version of events. They refused to review the policy guidance on the taking of a Place of Safety Orders.

The parents who are being assisted by local groups such as the West London NCCL and LAG have been accused by the Liberals of being 'politically motivated'. They belong to no political party. The Council have indicated that they now have a file on this family even though there has never been any allegation of neglect or injury. There has been no apology.

The parents have said they will carry on with their campaign until they see justice. With two by-elections pending in the Borough on which control of the Council rests, the Liberals are now desperately trying to find a fall-back position in an attempt to retain the veneer of being the party of 'Open Government'. But whatever they do cannot wipe away the totally inept handling of the case. What the case shows is that in government the Alliance civil liberties record is even worse than the Tories. Potential 'tactical voters ought to be warned.

Keith Vaz
Chair, Richmond and Barnes CLP

'STREET LIFE' SUPPLEMENT

On children and political activity.... from a woman without children...

What I am going to say may be controversial but I want to involve myself in the endless debate about being a 'political activist' while trying to bring up children, from the point of view of a single woman without children.

One of the things that struck me while I was in the process of deciding about not having kids of my own was the enormous amount of time and energy it takes to bring them up. Many people who decide they want children (and perhaps this applies even more to men than women) only seem to find this out as they go along, and even those who appear to have thought about it and planned it often end up in a situation where they feel their 'freedom' has disappeared, and that there is a constant struggle to stay politically active, go to meetings and conferences, work, and also spend enough time with their kids.

CHOOSING PRIORITIES

I have found a curiously unexpected result from being politically active as a person who, in theory, has all the time in the world to spend at meetings, day schools, conferences and demonstrations, rallies and talks. Going home alone after these events, there is nothing to allevaite the sense of frustration that can be generated, the despair and disillusionment following an acrimonious GMC, or a conference that achieves little. Going to the pub afterwards with other people is one way out (though resulting for me in adding exhaustion to depression). Most of the time it's back to the flat for a mug of tea and some TV rubbish in an attempt to unwind before falling into bed.

I suppose what I am trying to say is that we all need an antidote to whatever we spend most time doing: for me, a demanding job and the pressures of the many political activities going on in the evenings and weekends, as well as putting in some long hours producing a Labour Party newsletter for two years, ended up leaving me feeling mentally drained, and with a constant feeling that life was rushing past without me having any control over it.

FEELING GUILTY

So early this year I made a conscious decision to give up some things, at least temporarily, so that I could try and find out if all those other things that had seemed out of reach really were what I wanted to spend my time on. The ultimate aim is to try and find a balance that allows me to be a whole and creative human being, with physical and mental health intact, as well as channelling my political beliefs to where they are most effective.

Needless to say, over halfway through 1984, I am only just starting to sort out this intention, and one of the major things making it difficult has been the huge sense of guilt at *not* having the very valid excuse of childcare for taking some time off.

I have found myself apologising to women friends who do have kids for not being present at events, telling them I feel pathetic for being unable to cope when they obviously have more commitments than I do, even pretending to be ill rather than yet again to explain my reasons for missing something.

LEARNING TO STAND BACK

But I am reaching a point where I can see myself taking on more responsibilities again, gradually, carefully, saying 'yes' only when I mean it, not going along with the guilt feelings just so that I will be seen in the right places. Meanwhile it has been a valuable experience to stand back and let myself be dispensable.

I *don't* think this is something only a person with no family commitments can do – it's something that is difficult for all of us. But maybe it would do us all good if parents sometimes took single friends and comrades at their word and asked them to take over the family for a whole weekend, not just the odd evening or afternoon. Yes, I know that children have their own preferences and you can't just dump them on people they may not care for. But it's my experience that parents are often reluctant, for mysterious reasons, to trust their childless friends in this way. Maybe risking we are *not* indispensable after all is threatening for all of us, whether it is to our local Labour Party or to our kids. There is nothing simple about making deliberate and far-reaching decisions about what you want out of life, and this applies just as much to women who choose not to give birth as it does to those who do. Any such decision has its penalties and anxieties, and can cause sleepless nights! Perhaps there is a tendency in all of us to imagine the grass is greener etc, but in a way each of us makes choices that must result in other things taking second place. The problem is deciding which things come first; but I don't see why it shouldn't be possible to change your priorities around when you need or want to – what *doesn't* seem possible for anyone, childless or not, is to have a total commitment to all the aspects of our lives, all the time.

For me, the things that have taken second place in recent years include finishing decorating my flat (which has remained unfinished since I moved in more than 5 years ago), taking time for regular physical exercise, getting involved in my housing co-op, seeing friends, having holidays, getting enough rest, reading all the books I never read, writing all the articles I'd like to write . . . Does this sound familiar?

MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES

It sometimes feels as if there is a myth about the 'single childless political activist' that is as insidious as the myth of the 'perfect mother', both of these being stereotypes forced onto people in certain situations.

Like the 'perfect mother' (I don't include fathers as there is still not the same weight of social pressure on men to conform in this way) the single political activist is supposed to have an endless supply of time and energy to devote to the way of life they have 'chosen', without ever getting tired or depressed or lonely, or feeling they are missing out on 'freedom'.

But maybe it's something we should all face up to, in order to realise that freedom is something you make yourself, not something others take from you. To accept that fact, to believe that your life is continually a matter of making choices – surely is one of the most difficult, but also one of the most exhilirating discoveries there is.

NO MORE EXCUSES

Children are often a driving force in their parents' lives; a lot of campaigning activities make logical sense when you look at your kids. For people on their own, the driving force has to be found elsewhere. It's all too easy to let being busy take over so you are swept along constantly feeling 'if only I had time to . . . ' and believing you're the only one who doesn't have time to. You can let this sort of lifestyle become an excuse for not making any choices about anything. My driving force has to be myself, in the end, and when that starts to run out of steam – as it did at the end of last year, accompanied by continual bouts of an illness similar to glandular fever – it's time to set about refuelling, ready for the future.

For me this involves going back to some of the things that I have felt have taken second place for several years, including time to get more physically fit (no doubt in violent reaction to all those hours sitting in meetings) and time to do all the things I never seemed to have time for – playing with other people's children, for one.

Clare Mundy,
Consort Ward, Peckham CLP.

'STREET LIFE' SUPPLEMENT
BRIEFING
ON PERSONAL POLITICS

.... and from a mother

This is a sister article to Clare Mundy's written from a different background.

CHOOSING PRIORITIES – SORT OF

I didn't 'choose' to have children but I wasn't very good at preventing them. I had 3 unplanned children. So when I became involved in politics they were already around. The net result was that because of the structure of society they got neglected. I don't mean from the traditional family point of view, I live on my own with them and they spend many evenings by themselves, bits of weekends too. Meetings, conferences, election times, etc all take enormous amounts of my time and energy. Lots of things happening to my children I didn't pick up on because I wasn't at home. More importantly, I wasn't there to influence and guide them. Too often I am too exhausted to do anything other than fall into bed after a hard day at work including involvement in my union followed swiftly by various labour party meetings etc and yell out 'make me a cup of tea', 'do the washing up', 'feed the cats'. I have never got involved in child care campaigns. Unfairly I suppose I have always associated them with babies. Fights for creches don't help to cope with three teenagers. I wanted my dilemma to be recognised but I was aware that women who campaign/complain about politics and children get labelled and tend not to be taken seriously. I fooled myself I could cope – that being active and not letting my children interfere with my activities that some people didn't know I had any and they were amazed when they found out I had 3.

It says something about the big distance between the sloganising to get more women involved and the reality of the minute numbers of women with children struggling to do so.

SEEING THROUGH THE MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES

I used to view people without children as having a wonderful time. No limitations on their time and energy – they could be politicos 24 hours a day – no sweat.

Now I ask myself – should they? Should I be trying to achieve that either? I have recognised and argued that the way we organise must allow the involvement of everyone. A shorter political working week for all could be an idea we need to explore perhaps.

CHOOSING PRIORITIES

Recently I decided that spending time with my children is serious proper politics too.

Then co-incidentally (or was it?) I found I had *spare* time on my hands. 'What's this?' – I asked myself – 'Must fill it up' – then I stopped and thought.

Being involved in politics changes our lives and lifestyles. Some of us career from crisis to crisis resulting from the pressure these changes create. It's not until we intervene ourselves in this process and we have time to think, that we can look at what we are doing clearly and question 'Why?'

WHAT DO I WANT

I don't want my children to have a lasting memory of resentment towards politics. I want to involve them. It gives me a good feeling when they see through the media bias on the miners strike for example. They usually respond instinctively to situations. I vividly remember the riots of 1981. While I was speaking at the General Committee about the Labour Party needing to understand the frustration of young people which had caused the riots, one of my sons was being arrested in them. The police had phoned while I was at the GC. What irony. I spent the night and the rest of the next day trying to get him out of the police cell into hospital for his injuries to be treated.

All three of my children have a low opinion of the police. I don't need to explain the police's role – what they do need though is guidance to channel their anger and frustration politically.

I can't accept and don't accept responsibility for how my children turn out – a great deal is out of my control. But it is important to me that I have time to talk to them and persuade them about my political beliefs. 'My mum was a feminist nutcase' is not what I want them to have engraved on my gravestone.

LEARNING TO STAND BACK

I feel activists with children must stand back, positively with our sisters and brothers who don't have children. We mustn't denigrate being with our children as non-political.

We should also not use them just to create guilt in others. For anyone interested in reading about the last serious attempt, that I know of, to consider a comprehensive approach to dealing with socialism and the family in a capitalist society. I recommend Barbara Taylor's book 'Eve and the new Jerusalem'. It's about OWENISM. It was called utopian. 150 years have passed since it collapsed.

It seems to me ripe for people on the left to discuss the problems activists have in common, with or without children, as part of this very large debate.

Penny Newell
Liddle Ward – Peckham CLP

Editor: *Follow up articles on this issue would be gratefully received.*

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Write for the Streetlife Supplement!

NEXT ISSUE

In the next issue of the Streetlife Supplement we will be following up some of the themes raised in the August issue of **Briefing** *on kinship and the family, as well as continuing this month's theme of motherhood, children and political activity.*

Articles and letters should be sent to Jane Stockton, 31 Cranwich Road, London N16 *by* Saturday 10th November.

SUPPLEMENT MEETING

The next meeting of the Streetlife Supplement will be on Thursday 22nd November at 8pm at County Hall, London SE1.

KINSHIP CONFERENCE CATERING PRIZE

JOHN HARDY

YOU FED US BEAUTIFULLY!
FROM NOW ON WE'VE APPOINTED
YOU CHEF-IN-COMMAND!
(SIGNED)
DAVID THATCHER

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTORY COURSE FOR FEMINISTS AND SOCIALISTS

MORLEY COLLEGE, WESTMINSTER (NEAR LAMBETH NORTH TUBE)
WEDNESDAYS, 6.45 pm

(ASSEMBLE OUTSIDE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE EACH EVENING AT 6.30 TO BE INFORMED OF WHEREABOUTS OF LECTURE-ROOM).

LECTURER: CHRIS KNIGHT
Info: 852 2193