LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING
40p
No 48
APRIL 1985

RATECAPPED COUNCILS DEFIANT:

UNITY CAN WIN!

by MARGARET HODGE (Leader, Islington Council)

March 7th was a night to remember. The press reports on March 8th completely failed to reflect the spirit of confidence and unity which was expressed at the budget meetings of 15 Labour controlled councils, where a clear decision was taken to collectively resist the Government's attempts to cut services and jobs. Those of us who participated in those historic meetings were given a wonderful morale boost by the overwhelming support we received from thousands in our workforces and in our communities as we launched our struggle for local democracy. The mood at those meetings strengthened our resolve to fight attempts to destroy local government and slash services at the local level.

When we embarked on this campaign last July, many of us realised that our tactic was unlikely to be appropriate for the upper tier authorities. What we could not predict, was the appalling manner in which the leadership in London would manage their retreat and the deliberate attempt to bring the boroughs down with them..

The collapse of ILEA and the GLC has obviously damaged our cause, but the effect need not be lasting. There are 15 local authorities, representing over 3 million people, most of whom live in the deprived urban areas, who have taken a united stand.

GREAT ACHIEVEMENT

Our real position remains strong for the Government will not defeat local councils if they remain united. It is a great achievement that as many as 15 councils have stuck together so far. A few more may peel away, but as long as a sufficient core of authorities resolve to act collectively, our campaign can lead to victory.

There are 9 London boroughs which

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Demonstration against rate-capping, March 6th. John Chapman

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

BUILDING ON THE MASS SUPPORT

Most Council meetings are extremely tedious – all the decisions have been taken elsewhere at committee or group meetings. So it was quite extraordinary that on March 7th more people wanted to attend a Council meeting than even the largest hall could accommodate. The hundreds turned away had to listen to the meeting being relayed into other Council meeting rooms. Inside, people packed every corner, waving banners from women's groups, black groups, tenants' associations, and community groups, and from Town Hall and other local unions. The atmosphere was electric and defiant as we all realised that we have at least the beginning of a genuine mass movement in defence of local government.

The next question, of course, is how do we build on that? Several main approaches are already clear. Firstly, the main task of the unions in the coming weeks must be to demonstrate and reiterate maximum support for those Councils who are still not making a rate. Although the press and Tories have made a lot of mileage from the GLC's collapse, it does not represent the end of the campaign. Most trade unions assumed long ago that the GLC and ILEA would make rates – though few would have anticipated the extent to which Livingstone damaged the campaign by reneging on the 'no rate' policy.

Other Councils will be tempted to follow suit as the financial year starts. It is the job of the trade unions and the Labour parties to mobilise solid backing for those Councils who are prepared to stick to their policies. The total commitment of Hackney's trade unions behind their Councillors after the writs were served apparently helped Hackney Council maintain its position on March 7th. Other Councils will be under similar threats and letters will be circulating from District Auditors or local Ratepayers' Associations. While it is at all possible we must help to keep these Councils to the line.

The overwhelming support shown by workers and local people on March 6th and 7th should help the waiverers. They



John Chapman

Johanna Fawkes

know that if they do 'bottle out' at the last moment, they'll have all their supporters to contend with. No wonder some of them looked a little nervous at the size of the crowds outside the Town Halls. These people will not be taken in by the sudden discovery of a few million in the bank, a legal rate and the invitation to come back next year.

That's why it's important that all future Council meetings on ratecapping are held in large public halls. If the Councils do make a rate, they must do so in full view of those who have backed them, and whose votes they'll be asking for in 1986. It may interest Councillors with Parliamentary aspirations to know that London Bridge is writing to all affiliated trade unions asking that delegates oppose any candidates who have abandoned the no rate policy to protect their careers. The unions are also putting forward ideas which should bring the campaign into focus, such as the need to prioritise wages over debt charges and police precepts. Such courses may invite legal proceedings from various bodies, and Councillors have been very concerned about jeopardising their hard-won unity. It has indeed been a remarkable achievement that so many Councils did not make rates on March 7th. But it will not be possible to avoid the issues which threaten that unity indefinitely.

What is important now is to take action, such as the non-payment of charges and precepts, which will give the Councils the initiative, and for the unions to support that action so effectively that unity is maintained around a stronger policy than the resolutions passed on March 7th.

The crowds who supported the March 7th resolutions are clearly committed to far stronger action, as are the trade unions. When Council meetings are requisitioned by Tories hoping to split Labour Groups over the question of unlawful actions, far from backing down, Councillors must come out fighting.

Johanna Fawkes
London Bridge and Camden
Joint Trade Union Campaign

UNITY CAN WIN (continued)

remain in the struggle, 8 of them are rate-capped and the ninth is Newham, which finds itself in an impossible position, because of the punitive penalty system forcing the Council into massive rate rises to protect services.

Our objective remains to call for collective negotiations with Government. We demand the return of the monies of which we have been robbed, so that we can provide existing services and respond to new and growing needs without imposing further massive rate rises. We also seek to set aside the Rates Act so that we protect our democratic right to determine local budgets.

Further Council meetings may be forced on us by the opposition groups in our Town Halls. We shall endeavour to co-ordinate those meetings so that collective action by all of us can support and protect every individual borough and individual councillor within each borough.

As we move into the new financial year, legal pressures on us will increase, but equally the pressure on the Government will also increase. Intransigence on their part can only add to our public support and hence our strength.

FRONTLINE

All the London Labour Councils in the frontline have established structures which enable Councillors to take full financial control away from the officers. This will allow us to maintain our commitment to meet our bills for wages and services as a first priority.

We are examining together bills which should be met in the first quarter of the next financial year, so that we can take collective action on withholding certain payments. Our aim will be to increase the pressure on the Government and maintain our priority payments for as long as possible. Some interesting options present themselves. Should we pay our preceptors, especially the GLC and the Metropolitan Police? Should we withhold our payments to Government for PAYE, VAT, and the employers' contribution to National Insurance? Should we postpone payment for utilities (gas and electricity) and insurances? What should we do about meeting our interest payments on debt? Again, we want to evolve a collective and united approach which will give maximum effect to our campaign.

The unity among elected councillors in the different boroughs is dependent on the strength and unity of the trades unions. Our success relies on the determination to refuse to work with commissioners should the Government attempt to impose them.

We are moving into unchartered territory. Pressures on individuals and on Labour groups will undoubtedly increase. Our aim must be to strengthen and support all our comrades who are in the frontline, so that we can enjoy the widest possible support for a campaign which could inflict massive damage on this Government and which is so crucial in the struggle to protect public services at the local level.

ESCALATE NON-COMPLIANCE!

About 1,000 people waited in Woolwich Town Hall on March 7th for the Council to decide not to set a rate. The debate was relayed round the Town Hall through closed circuit television monitors. The Council meeting was preceeded by a trade union rally organised by the Joint Shop Stewards Committee. The atmosphere was electric and jubilant and the decision not to set a rate was greeted as a great victory by everyone there.

The decision by the Labour Group to carry out party policy and pursue non-compliance has been unanimous and on all available evidence will continue to be so.

With the lower tier rate-capped authorities acting together and in unison with Liverpool and Manchester, it was inevitable that the press coverage the following morning would seek to divide us by concentrating on the position of the precepting authorities and dubbing the whole exercise a disaster. It has not been a disaster for the lower tier authorities and the way forward must be to escalate non-compliance with the government and encourage all labour authorities, rate-capped or not, to join us.

We must consider:

**Taking the initiative from our opposition groups by calling our own council meetings where we continue to fail to set a rate.*

**Examining council expenditure to establish a priority for payments, e.g. wages, salaries.*



SUPPORTING GREENWICH

**Examining council expenditure to establish a priority for non-payments, e.g. PAYE, precepts, debt charges.*

**Examining all departmental contracts with central government in order to sever those which cause maximum frustration to central government.*

The battle on the Rates Act will not be won overnight and we must accept that the lower tier authorities will have to enter the arena of illegality and risk surcharge before the government accepts we mean business.

Each CLP should ensure that numbers do add up in Labour Groups if we are to avoid the fiasco at County Hall being repeated.

Other measures of non-compliance should be used to maximum effect to show Jenkin we are prepared to go all the way. Our task now is to look forward and to continue to campaign together, not to look back and dwell on the minor casualties.

Claer Lloyd-Jones,
Chair of the Labour Group,
London Borough of Greenwich

HACKNEY STANDS FIRM

Philippa Jones (Hackney South and Shoreditch CLP)

Hackney Council voted on March 7th not to set a rate until the Government acts responsibly and returns the rate support grant stolen from local people. The meeting decided not to increase rents and recognised that an eventual rate level should not exceed the rate of inflation.

The vote was overwhelming. There were 39 Labour Councillors and one Liberal who voted for, leaving only eight Labour renegades with the other Liberals and Tories. An amendment was moved by Neil Kinnock's adviser, Councillor Charles Clarke (ex-NUS President), to water down the main resolution so that no decisions at all would be taken. And when the amendment was rejected, he then voted against the main resolution!

Over 1,000 people had gathered at the Town Hall for a rally. The Council meeting was relayed by close-circuit TV to an assembly hall. Once the decision was reached, some Councillors and local people broke into song, with the chamber resounding to "The Red Flag" and the miners' song "Here We Go"

What makes Hackney's decision so important is that unlike any other authority, Councillors were served with a court order *before* the meeting. Mourad Flemming, a SDP candidate who lost a recent by-election to Labour, had successfully applied to the High Court for legal action against the Council before he had even seen the budget motion!

The court then, during the day of March 7th, enforced orders requiring the council to set a rate for '85/6 that could not be above the rate-capped level. And until a legal rate is set the Council cannot use money tenants may choose to pay in rates after April 1st, nor can the Council borrow against anticipated received revenue.

Labour Councillors' feelings were further enflamed by a letter from Flemming to a Liberal Councillor, David Gamper, saying that the Solicitor to the Department of the Environment had told him that if the Liberal Group were put in a position where they had to make a budget then the Government would make more money available and that no writs would be served against them.

DEFENDED THE PEOPLE

And so for Hackney the stakes were already high on the evening of March 7th. Yet despite intimidation, the Councillors went ahead and defended the people of the borough and not the Tory laws. Now the Councillors are up against the ban on borrowing money. This will sabotage the Council's financial system which depends on borrowing money daily. The Council's cash flow could be choked before April 1st.

Campaigning on the strategy of non-compliance with the Rates Act and the "Three Noes" – no cuts, no rent rises and no rate rises above inflation – has united Labour Councillors and the Labour Parties with trade unionists and thousands of local people. With such strength, there is great confidence that the Government's day-light robbery can be halted.

All along the efforts of activists in Hackney Labour Parties have gone into building a principled campaign with a leadership at the Town Hall who are actually prepared to stand by party policy. Democracy and the will to struggle have gone hand in hand – the next few weeks and possibly months will challenge us to galvanise our movement with rallies, street meetings and demonstrations.



John Chapman

Southwark Council Chamber, March 7th. Left to right, Graeme Geddes, Deputy Leader, Tony Ritchie, Leader, and Les Alden, Chief Whip.

Southwark: euphoria... and weary cynicism

Southwark Council's decision to defer making a rate has been received with a certain weary cynicism by some, euphoria by others, and with a sense of disgust in other quarters.

To some the council's debate and vote on rate-capping on March 7th seemed to be a miraculous show of unity at the end of a hard campaign. A march to the Town Hall and a rally there was attended by over 2,000 people: trades unionists, tenants association activists, people from the voluntary sector and so on. All speakers stressed that Southwark needed more services, not less. Many spoke of the democratic rights which were now being overridden by Jenkin and Thatcher.

The representatives from the voluntary sector were particlarly vocal, feeling themselves to be closest to the knife's edge. Southwark's relative wealth amongst the rate-capped councils has meant that it is largely grants to the voluntary sector, particularly those given by Race Committee and Women's Committee, perhaps the weakest, because less traditional, committees of any council, which will suffer.

The council meeting began with seventeen deputations from various interest groups in Southwark, most of whom presented petitions. The questioning of these deputations took a considerable time, and the debate started late. Tory and Liberal motions were soon defeated and the resolution to defer making a rate was passed. This led to a mood of jubilation and Labour councillors and the public galleries indulged in community singing of The Red Flag and Here We Go!

Whether this euphoria will survive in the aftermath of March 10th's GLC decision is another question. Although the tactic to defer a rate was agreed by the Local Government Campaign Unit after lengthy negotiations between the councils it has already been criticised by many who feel that it is basically a face-saving device, which will cover the scant desire for illegality felt by most Southwark Councillors (and no doubt, others elsewhere in the boroughs). It is hard to say how easy it will be to maintain the no-rate threat after the GLC and ILEA decisions.

Amidst the excitement of Thursday night there was already considerable scepticism about the final outcome. Many saw Ken Livingstone's manoeuvering in the GLC and ILEA as a "sell-out" and there was much support for Lesley Hammond (GLC member for Dulwich) who stood against anything but a no-rate option. The struggle to force councillors not to make a rate has had a lot of its fire extinguished now, and a certain weary cynicism makes its presence felt. People are waiting to see what deal will be offered by Jenkin despite constant calls for no let-up in the campaign.

Kate Hamlyn (Dulwich CLP)

SOUTH AGAINST RATE

LAMBETH FIGHTS

March 7th for Lambeth represents the day when the accountability of Labour councillors to the labour movement became the prime issue. At a packed and euphoric council meeting all 34 Labour councillors voted not to set a rate. There was tremendous support from the masses of trade unionists and local people who packed in and around the Town Hall in Brixton. That meeting, triumphant and moving as it was, represents only the beginning, however.

We were voting on a perfectly legal motion. It was consciously drafted by Ted Knight so as not to upset the delicate stomachs of those on the Labour Group who find the prospect of following Labour Party policy not to their liking. *Now is the time for the Labour Party and the trade union movement to enforce socialist discipline on these comrades.*

Ted Knight

Ted Knight made a rousing speech at the AGM of the Greater London Labour Party pointing out that the Labour comrades on the GLC and ILEA have known for many months that following Labour Party policy could lead to the breaking of Tory laws. It is therefore hypocritical and treacherous of those comrades now to try and hide behind fudging, double-talking, shambolic compromises in an attempt to save their own necks and their own political careers. That was well said, Ted, and it applies just as much to you and to all of us on the Lambeth Labour Group!

The trade unions in Lambeth Town Hall offer the Labour Group total support in carrying out our policy of defying the Rates Act. But if any of us were to back down, the trade unions must join with the local Labour Parties in hounding any Labour hypocrites out of office and out of the party. At the eleventh hour the Lambeth Labour Parties have seen the closet conservatives in the Group starting to show their hands — "Oh we can't do anything illegal!"; "Oh we can't be expected to stand on our own!" What miserable hypocrisy! What these comrades have to realise is that no socialist on the Group will work with

LONDON CAPPING BACK

them ever again if they betray Party policy now. We will not administer a Tory rate and the trade unions will destroy us if we *try* it. The unions have rightly pledged to bring Lambeth to a halt if a Tory rate and the Tory cuts are implemented *by anybody!*

Sorry Spectacle

The Labour Party in London has already seen with dismay and disbelief the sorry spectacle of Ken Livingstone and the GLC and ILEA Labour Groups (with honourable exceptions) joining the ranks of the miserable careerists from the past. We in Lambeth now have the chance to redress that betrayal. Ted Knight must spell out clearly once again the two pillars of Labour Party policy on the Rates Act:

*No rate to be set until the 1984 Rates Act is withdrawn.

*No rate to be set until the inner city areas get back their stolen grant money.

There must be no retreat on these policies; there can be no compromise. Labour councillors, the Labour Parties, the trade unions and the people of Lambeth must stand together to defy Jenkin and Thatcher and win the battle for Lambeth!

Des Atkinson,
Lambeth Labour Councillor,
Stockwell Ward

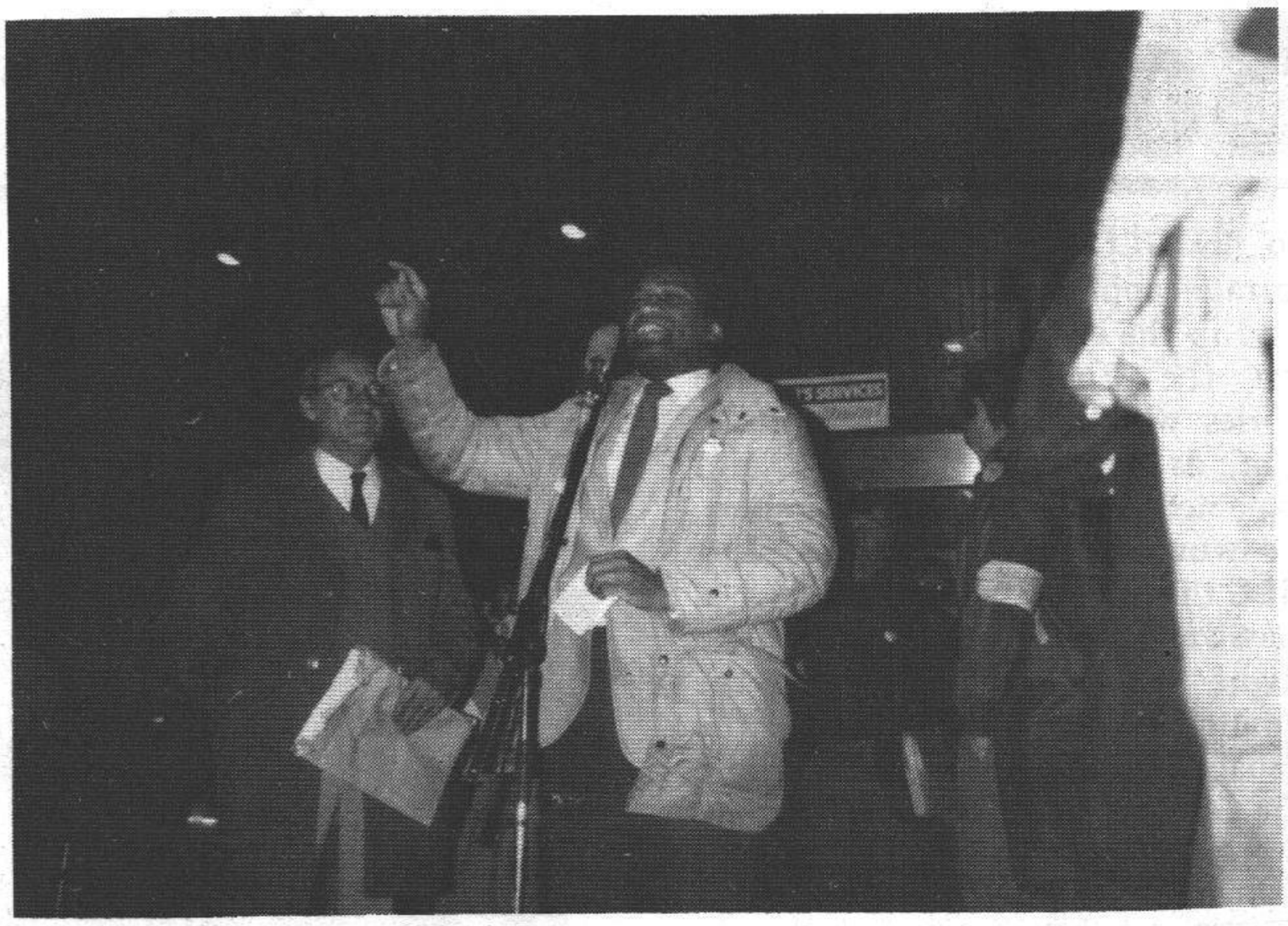
Four South London Boroughs Act Together

Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark are all rate-capped. We are fighting together because the combined effect of rate-capping on our boroughs represents a disaster for South London.

A special conference for every member of our Labour Groups, and representatives of our Joint Shop Stewards Committees and LGCs is being held on Sunday April 14th to continue our campaign together.

It will be held at the Borough Hall, Royal Hill, Greenwich, SE10 from 10.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. Representatives from other rate-capped authorities and our MPs have also been invited.

For further details contact Len Duvall, Greenwich Campaign Unit, tel. 317 1668.



Russell Profitt, deputy leader of Lewisham Council, addresses the mass rally, March 7th.

HOW LONG WILL LEWISHAM STAND FIRM?

Predictably, Lewisham Council didn't carry out its declared intention to 'not set a rate' on March 7th. Like other Labour boroughs, the decision was simply deferred. And from the queue of Labour Councillors who spoke at the lobby of the meeting to say that they would only vote against setting a rate while it remained legal to do so, there must be questions as to just how long Lewisham can stand firm.

A massive demonstration, mainly of Council workers, with voluntary sector, tenants groups and labour parties all represented, greeted the Councillors going into the meeting. The mood was defiant – Tories and Labour waverers alike were given a rough time. The local Party policy of "no cuts in jobs or services, no rent rises, no rate rises" clearly has wide support amongst the Town Hall unions. The councillors who did get up to pledge themselves to standing firm against the Government were given tremendous applause – but were also kept in their place by a Council engineer who pointed out that cuts were *already* taking place – there are now 17 fewer workers in the Engineers' Department.

As Briefing goes to press, the Tories are pushing for a Council meeting before the end of March, by which time they expect to gain support from enough Labour Councillors for a budget of cuts. The decision of GLC and ILEA to remain within the law will have a knock-on effect on the boroughs. Many Labour Groups will say "the GLC didn't put their necks on the line, why should we?" One Lewisham Labour Councillor has already done the honourable thing and resigned – the by-election should now be fought all-out on the issue of local democracy and services.

Hither Green branch has called for a recruitment drive and publicity aimed at Town Hall and other public sector workers, to ensure they are fully involved in all decisions made. Also, it has called for a Resistance Conference of the borough's labour, trade union, tenants and community groups to organise the fightback against the Government. Whilst congratulating the Labour Group on their stand so far, Party members must realise that the time will soon come when it cannot hold a majority in the Council Chamber. At that time it must be made clear that Councillors making cuts and raising rents are *not* doing so as the Labour Party. The Party must be preparing the strongest resistance alongside the Council unions and tenants associations who will feel the brunt of the cuts. The struggle ahead will not be easy, but it is a struggle we must win if we are to keep the Labour Party alive as a credible force in Lewisham. More cuts and job losses by Labour Councils will ensure we never again receive the mass support we need. There are Labour Councillors who will stand firm to the bitter end, but we must now recognise that the serious fightback against Government policies will come from the Town Hall workforce.

KEVIN FLACK
(EAST LEWISHAM CLP)

Sold down the river

So the GLC and ILEA capitulated to rate-capping and made a precept. And in the end, on paper at least, it was the Right voting with the Tories which led to that capitulation, as expected. What was not expected by most Party members, we would suspect, is that leading GLC members would mount a massive campaign to blame not the Right but the Left, both on the Council and outside, for the debacle, and to do so even before the GLC took its decision.



It had long been obvious to comrades centrally-involved in the rate-capping struggle that there was no way that the GLC would go illegal on March 7 – indeed most GLC Members saying they would support GLLP policy did so believing they would never be at risk. However the situation dramatically altered when legal opinion was gained saying that opposition GLC Members could abstain, if they had already proposed a legal budget and they would be "markedly less likely to surcharge". In the event of Tory abstention, the final result would depend on the majority in the Labour Group, rather than the Council.

Systematically undermine

Given the new situation, it had become, not certain but nevertheless possible, that a no rate option could be carried in the Council. At this point several leading Councillors began to systematically undermine the "no rate" position. Leading GLC figures, including Ken Livingstone and Valerie Wise, had therefore succeeded in killing the "no rate" option in the Labour Group – but were able to preserve their own credibility on paper by voting for it in both the Group and the Council. Tragically, as a result, those left Councillors who were prepared to abide by and actively pursue Labour Party policy were set up as scapegoats – and this only a few days before the Boroughs had their Council meetings, where Groups were fighting to hold the "no rate" policy.

At the GLC Labour Group meeting on 4th March, many Group members and Party members were amazed to be presented with a document drawn up by Reg Race showing how the GLC could avoid going illegal on 7th March. We were informed that the document represented a newly-devised strategy which it would not have been possible to present to Regional Conference the day before. Yet Reg Race's general budget strategy had been known to Ken Livingstone since October 1984 and was obviously a possible option, if the Group opted against not making a rate. Why present it out of the blue on 4th March?

And why carrry out a campaign to vilify not only other Group members but also comrades in the Boroughs? Because they were at least moving in the direction of opposing the government? In his report to the Regional Executive on the day after the GLC decision, Ken says: "Although I was under considerable pressure . . . to expose the posturing of some of the Borough leaders, I felt that such a public attack would weaken the whole rate-capping campaign . . ." and yet it was Ken who said at the 4th March Labour Group: "those comrades who listened to Ted Knight deliberately and wilfully lie to the London Labour Party conference . . ." and: "we should stand firm to allow London Boroughs like Lambeth and Camden to do what they are claiming rather than what they are pretending to do."

Such an attack may not have been overtly public but it was certainly public enough in Party terms to deliver a blow to the morale of the Borough Labour Groups just before March 6th and 7th. Fortunately the events in the rate-capped Boroughs themselves on March 7th, where each Town Hall was lobbied by thousands of local people and the events in the Council chambers themselves lived up to all expectations. but, with Ken's ability to hog the headlines, where was the publicity for the Boroughs' actions?

On the day after the Labour Group, the Association of London Local Government Committees, following the ALA Labour Group's expression of full support for John McDonnell, wrote to Ken Livingstone as follows:

"I write on behalf of the Association to express our grave concern at the statements you have made in respect of the stance taken by the rate-capped London Boroughs. The decision by the rate-capped Boroughs to "defer making a rate" as opposed to "refusing to make a rate", made in early February, was taken following consultation with our Association and whilst we expressed some concern at the stance, we agreed that the position of the Boroughs is such that it was the right stance to take.

"It is our position that we should be refusing to comply with the Rates Act and to gain concessions from the DoE on Rate Support Grant and we consider that the stance taken is fully in line with this position.

"The Association was dismayed to hear your contribution at the Greater London Regional Meeting on Sunday when 'out of the blue' you called upon the Boroughs to refuse to set a rate, with the suggestion that to defer setting the rate would be a 'cop out'.

"As Leader of the GLC you have had the opportunity to take part in all the discussions that have taken place at the ALA and the LGIU and it is quite appalling that having left John McDonnell to attend the meetings you have not only publicly undermined the agreed policy but also your GLC representative.

"We would urge you to refrain from saying anything more in public that in any way detracts from the unified stance that the Boroughs are taking."

In the light of what transpired in the following days, it is a shame such advice was not followed! At the Regional EC the day after the GLC meeting, the following resolution was passed: "This EC views with alarm the damaging split opened up in the rate-capped authorities' unity. We applaud the actions of those councillors (and borough councillors) who have supported the policy of the Greater London Labour Party and call on them to campaign in the movement to protect jobs and services that are now at risk. We declare our support for those authorities which have steadfastly supported Party policy by not setting a rate. We support any action taken by trade unions to defend jobs and services and call upon all Labour controlled authorities to do likewise."

Unreserved support

Briefing supporters must now give unreserved support to the actions of the 10 GLC councillors who, despite considerable personal pressure, stood firm on Party policy, especially in the context of the united stand of confrontation with the Tory Rates Act. We must campaign in the rate-capped Boroughs and in the London Labour Party for mass support for those councillors still fighting. We must also accept that these developments will have done nothing to strengthen the resolve of those councillors who are supporting Party policy, and that, when the crunch comes, some of the Boroughs and authorities outside London, who said it was impossible to make a rate on March 7th will not be with us.

The weaknesses and strengths of these Boroughs which have taken a united stand in line with policy must be recognised. It is our responsibility to campaign with, and organise for, those councillors and local authorities who remain solid, and turn the Party policy firmly into action.

Kevin Veness (Treasurer, Association of London Local Government Committees)
Lesley Seary (Vice-Chair, ALGC)
Steve Wyler, (Hampstead and Highgate CLP)

The following comrades stood by Party policy of not fixing a rate and therefore voted against a "Labour" budget and precept at the GLC on 10th March:
Tony Banks, Paul Boateng, Bryn Davies, Jenni Fletcher, Lesley Hammond, John McDonnell, Paul Moore, Charlie Rossi, Dave Wetzel, Deirdre Wood.

Tony Banks,
Paul Boateng,
Bryn Davies,
Jenni Fletcher,
Lesley Hammond,
John McDonnell,
Paul Moore,
Charlie Rossi,
Dave Wetzel,
Deirdre Wood.

NO IFS, NO BUTS, NO FLIM FLAM, NO WISH-WASH, NO RATE !

Steve Taylor, Hampstead and Highgate CLP, Camden LGC, (in a personal capacity)

The immediate reaction within the Labour Party to the GLC/ILEA decisions to comply with the Tories' rate-capping legislation is one of confusion. The confusion is exacerbated by the fact that, at the end of the day, the GLC leader supported the position that compliance with rate-capping is preferable to a position of non-compliance which cannot command a majority.

The implications of this position are enormous. They will allow the right wing in Labour Groups across the country to argue against a position of non-compliance and illegality. Their grounds for doing so will be familiar to all of those who have followed the spurious debate which has taken place within the GLC and ILEA. Direct cuts in jobs and services can be either hidden or stage-managed out of existence. Non-compliance will leave us isolated and, heaven forbid, illegal. We only need to survive another year until the Borough elections in May 1986.

The fundamental issue of rate-capping is not, and never has been, whether a Labour-controlled administration can survive within the perimiters defined by the Tories. It is whether or not such perimeters should be accepted. This was the issue confronting the GLC/ILEA Labour Groups and is still the issue confronting the rate-capped Labour-controlled Local Authorities.

It is essential that the answer is unequivocal. The only vote which is against rate-capping is a vote of non-compliance. A vote against fixing a rate altogether. To fix a rate is to act within the perimiters of Tory-defined expenditure, Tory-defined levels of jobs and services. There can be absolutely no compromise on this position.

The quasi-legal formula adopted by the rate-capped London Boroughs on March 7th – where all the Labour-controlled Authorities stated that it was impossible to set a rate – succeeded in uniting a cross-section of trades unionists, community groups and organisations, behind a position of non-compliance. This position must be strengthened, and the unity which exists in the rate-capped Boroughs must be broadened. It is of prime importance that Labour Party members throughout London demand that their Councillors continue to adhere to a position of non-compliance.

Legality or illegality

Eventually, as with the GLC and ILEA, the question confronting Labour Authorities will be one of legality or illegality. We must ensure that Councillors refuse to comply with the legislation. The arguments advanced within the GLC/ILEA Labour Groups in support of compliance must be exposed and the position of the Left on the rate-capped Labour Groups must be strengthened. Lobbies, demonstrations, resolutions and letters in support of non-compliance must be made immediately. Local Government Committees and Constituency Parties must act to put pressure on Councillors who attempt to use those arguments advanced within the GLC. We must stand firm against rate-capping and in support of Councillors who refuse to set a Tory Rate.



Southwark Council Chamber, March 7th. John Chapman

ILEA's OPPORTUNISM

On February 11th, following a call for strike action in support of the miners, 23 schools went on strike, and a far larger number sent delegations to the mass pickets at Neasden and Tilbury. ILTA had made a call for strike action only to have it turned down by our national union. Despite the action being unofficial, a number of primary schools which had never taken unofficial action decided to strike.

The ILEA was written to, asking that those taking solidarity action with the miners only lose a day's pay and not be disciplined by the ILEA. Those who took action on that day are now receiving disciplinary letters from ILEA. Many hundreds of teachers already have letters from a previous strike in support of the miners on 27th June.

In the event, the action by Inner London teachers was crucial in getting solidarity action in other industries. A massive response could well have given the miners enough heart to have fought on to March 6th when they could have joined the massive demonstration on rate-capping on the anniversary of their strike.

If ILEA Labour members were serious in their support for the miners they should not have threatened those prepared to show their solidarity with the miners. Their actions did, if in only a small way, hasten the end of the miners' strike.

Not keen on the second front

But judging by the way Steve Bundred, Frances Morrell, Ruth Gee or Andy Harris voted on the ILEA Budget they were not that keen on opening up a 'second front' by voting for an illegal budget. Perhaps it was precisely because the miners had gone back that they did not feel like leading a fight on rate-capping.

Those of us, on the ground, who are committed to education for working class children and committed as trade unionists to fighting all cuts, are not able to vacillate in the way the ILEA Labour Group did on March 7th.

The political opportunism demonstrated by the majority of Labour members over the budget matches the way they have dealt with their teachers over the past few years.

On the morning of March 7th at Education Committee, only seven members voted for the Officers' Budget to make a legal budget with £24 million cuts. In the afternoon at the ILEA they voted by 24 to 10 to accept a similar formulation of a legal budget from Alex McKay. The McKay amendment allowed for taking money out of the building fund and asked the GLC to lower its charges rather than impose £24 million cuts. This amendment paved the way for 17 Labour members to later vote against Party policy and for setting a legal rate.

Hostile to ILTA

The majority of the ILEA Labour Group under Frances Morrell's leadership have always been hostile to the Inner London Teachers' Association (ILTA), the London Division of NUT representing 13,500 of ILEA's 21,000 school teachers.

As falling rolls have worked their way through the schools ILEA has been determined to cut teachers in line with falling rolls. This led to the loss of 3,500 primary teaching jobs in five years. In the secondary sector ILEA has said 2500 jobs must go over the next four years. Built into the Budget voted on on 20th November was a secondary job loss of 943, nearly 10% of the secondary teachers.

ILTA argued with ILEA that they should create new posts in every school to implement the anti-sexist, anti-racist initiatives and the 104 proposals in the Hargreaves report – "Improving Secondary Schools". These requests have not been listened to. Frances Morrell has repeatedly said this is the age of initiatives not resources. In other words, teachers have to do more for less money (in real terms).

HOW THEY VOTED ON MARCH 7TH.

'THE McKAY AMENDMENT'

FOR	*AGAINST*
J. Fowler	*Tony Banks*
N. Davis	*D. Bigwood*
F. Morrell	*Helen Crossfield*
S. Bundred	*B. Crossman*
G. Nicholson	*B. Davies*
M. Morgan	*N. Fletcher*
P. Aylmer	*L. Hammond*
H. Hinds	*C. Rossi*
G. Ross	*D. Wetzel*
J. Carr	*D. Wood*
A. McKay	
R. Gee	
J. Brannigan	
G. Dimpson	
P. Moore	
A. Brammall	
M. Garside	
A. Harris	
L. Herbert	
K. Livingstone	
S. Turney	
B. Gnanapragasam	
V. Wise	

School closures and amalgamation

The big stick to back this up has been a huge school closure and amalgamation programme backed up by forced movement and last year 'voluntary' redundancy.

The dissatisfaction of teachers over these measures has been shown in a whole series of strikes against ILEA over compulsory transfer.

Equally ILEA's insistence that covering for absent teachers is contractual has led to the disciplining of many teachers for refusing to cover. We would not have expected ILEA to line up with reactionary Tory authorities.

None of the ways ILEA has treated its teachers seem to make any sense, if you examine the relatively small amounts of money that would have been needed to end compulsory movement or create new posts or indeed adequate supply provision to cover for absences.

And yet if as is now clear the ILEA leadership was not ever prepared to oppose rate-capping but was only taking an opportunist stance, it is necessary for ILEA to continually cut back to get in line with government rate-capping levels. In order to do this effectively the ILEA officers, backed by Labour members need to assert the right to manage and in ways reminiscent of the NCB – attack the teachers' unions while closing uneconomic schools and getting rid of uneconomic – surplus – teachers.

How can we have surplus teachers when there is so clearly a need for a vast increase in educational provision in the hugely deprived areas that now make up much of Inner London.

The resolution passed recently at the Greater London Labour Party Conference clearly shows there is an alternative. Only if local Labour Party members fight with and join up with those opposing any further cuts and rationalisation of our schools can we force ILEA to build a real alliance with those who use and work in our schools against the effects of rate-capping.

Richard Rieser,
Hackney NUT President,
Ex-ILTA General Secretary



FRANCES MORRELL

Sexual bullying in London Fire Brigade

A recent case of a woman firefighter sexually bullied beyond endurance in the London Fire Brigade has once again demonstrated that sexual harassment is a crucial issue for feminists, socialists and trade unions. A woman firefighter was tied up by the men, had urine poured over her, was hosed down till she agreed to have oral sex with a fireman, and had a man masturbate in front of her. A number of firemen were disciplined but only one, Langford, was sacked. He appealed with legal assistance from the FBU and was reinstated by the GLC Fire Brigades Committee. Those voting for reinstatement included Labour councillors Jenni Fletcher, vice-chair of the Women's Committee, and Neil Davies. At the London regional conference on 3rd March, an emergency resolution was carried urging immediate preventive measures by both union and employer to combat harassment in GLC workplaces.

In sexual harassment cases, unions like the FBU should undoubtedly start connecting the pious statements they produce on sexual harassment with the appalling treatment meted out continuously to women by their members. But the union is not the only culpable party in this sordid affair.

For starters, there is the fire brigade management. Women were first recruited to the fire service in the summer of 1983. As a result, five women have been plunged into the deep end of masculine bigotry and chauvinism by being allocated to otherwise male fire stations. As a group, they would have had a fighting chance against the sexual bullying all women at work suffer but which can only be accentuated where they are such an easy target. What was needed then were the measures belatedly included in the resolution taken at the London Conference. Firstly, there has to be sexual harassment training for women in how to build up a case and get incidents witnessed and documented. Secondly, male employees should be given sexism awareness training. Thirdly, this training for both sexes should be coupled with proper punitive measures in the discipline code. Of all these measures, the management has moved only on the discipline code. For this reason the final preventive measure needed is sexism awareness training for management involved in recruiting, training, promoting or supervising women. It has to be made quite clear to management that *mis*management of the GLC's positive action programme will not be tolerated and that it is not enough to come down on one offender when it is too late to do anything else.

There is also the behaviour of the two committees involved – the Fire Brigades Committee and the Equal Opportunities Committee. Langford should have stayed sacked and Jenni Fletcher's line has made her position as vice-chair of the Women's Committee untenable. On Neil Davis, no comment.

It is worth adding in passing that the 1983 London Women's Conference passed a resolution calling for a code of practice on sexual harassment of party women by 'male comrades'. As ever this has been ignored. Will a woman have to be harassed in the House of Commons or a council chamber before the Party moves?

Turning to the Equal Opportunities Committee, over a year ago a programme for women in London was written for a special GLC manifesto conference scheduled for Autumn 1984. This was cancelled and London women told that the document – "Women in London – Future Policy" – had been 'remitted to committee.' It contains a detailed section on equal opportunities in GLC workplaces, including exactly the provisions on sexual harassment brought out again in the emergency resolution put to the London conference. Clearly remittal did not lead to early implementation. But even without this document to guide them, the Equal Opportunities Committee should have been aware of the problems of sexual harassment and women in male-dominated workplaces. Vast amounts of research have been done on both subjects which all point to the need for detailed preventive action.

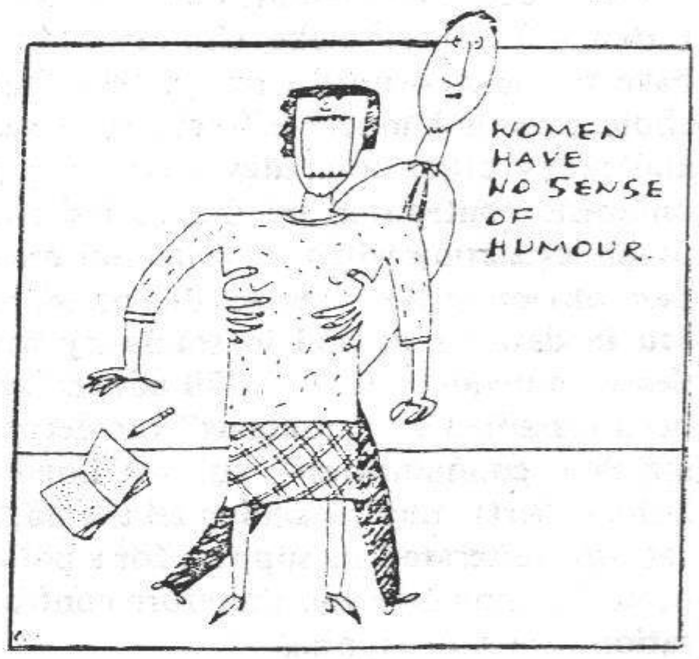
Far reaching implications

This case has far-reaching implications for all women, particularly those in workplaces controlled by allegedly progressive Labour councils. More than pious waffle is needed to stamp out endemic sexual bullying. While all women are subjected to it, it is at its worst where male anger towards women is at its height, for example, where women are breaking into well-paid male preserves. Since successful industrial action some years ago, the fire service is one of the best paid manual occupations. Trendy policies bringing women into engineering, etc., are worse than useless without safeguards. The feminist organisation "Women in Telecom" have horror stories to tell about the treatment of women fitters in BT.

Two other groups of women particularly at risk are black and working class women. I will not speak for black women, as I wish to avoid the "and blacks too" style of left writing. But I hope black women will write something about the double jeopardy of being black and a woman, where sexual harassment is concerned. On class however, too many working class men show contempt for working class women. The mythology that some women "ask" for sexual harassment is often really about being working class, which signals a come-on to men who cannot bear the thought that disadvantaged women might be as good or better at a job than themselves.

Sexual harassers

The alchemy that turns fathers, brothers and friends into sexual harassers is not properly understood but is perhaps a projection onto women of the bullying of men by men that is part of the macho baggage men are forced to cart around with them, especially at work. I write as a trade union woman actively campaigning to get the unions in my workplace to take on board equal opportunities for women,

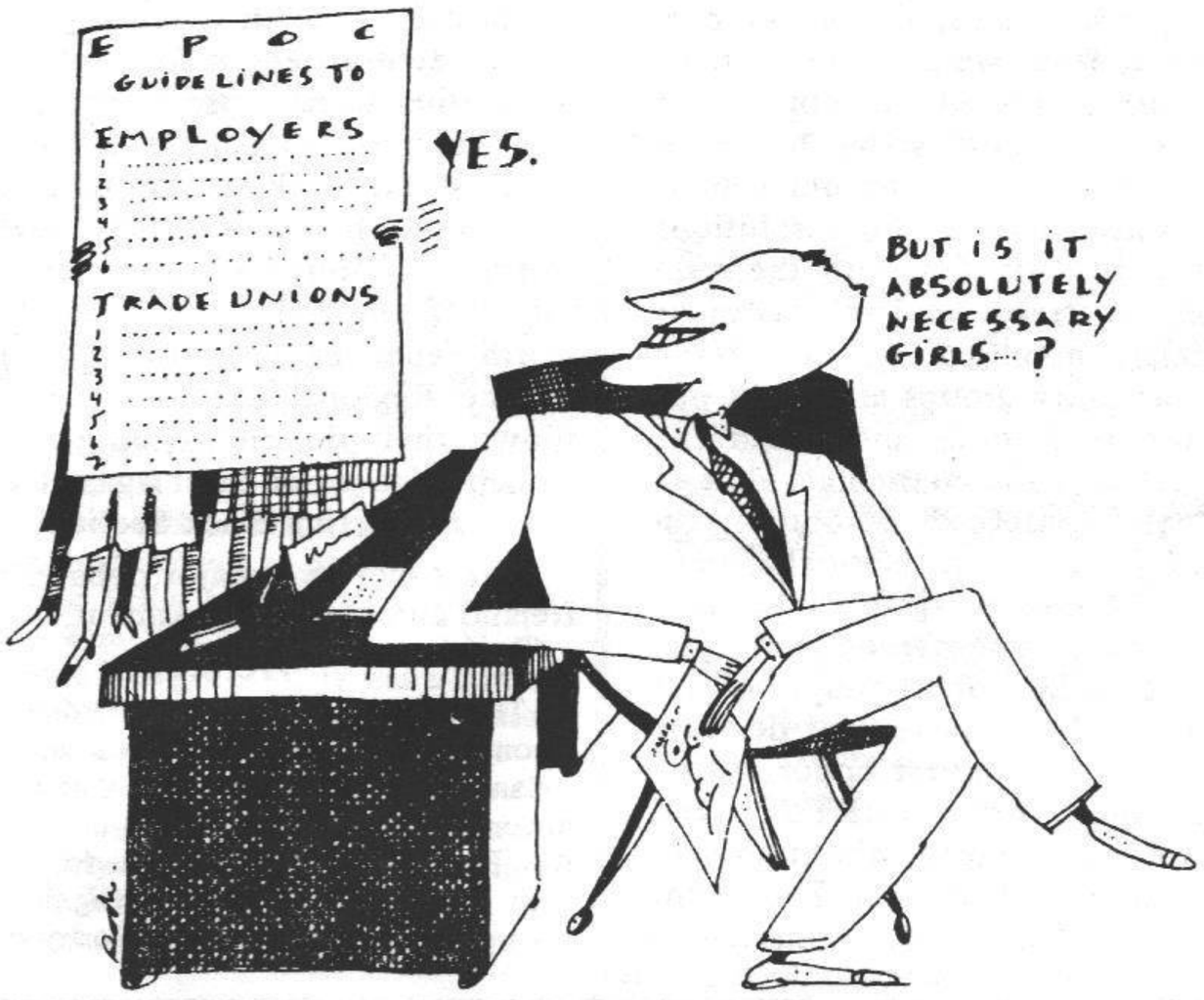


including measures on sexual harassment. Their intransigence makes the FBU look quite saintly. Are you listening, Alan Tuffin?

Women are, however, right to include the FBU in their anger in this case. There is still time for the union to take away Langford's card. Are you listening, Ken Cameron? And the unions as a whole, including the TUC, must start linking the truck loads of worthy statements on sexual harassment with actions to match. They should look to internal procedures to ensure that women in sexual harassment cases have powerful and sympathetic representation from within the union. One answer is a hierarchy of union women's organisations with sufficient clout in the union's power-making structures.

Where suffering on this scale exists, political rhetoric will not suffice. Careful, thorough, long-term measures by union, management and politicians are needed to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

Josie Edwards (SCPS and London Regional Women's Committee)



LONDON LABOUR PARTY

The London Labour Party Conference on the weekend of 3rd/4th March was confronted with the realities of class struggle. As one delegate said: "The prospect of hanging wonderfully concentrates the mind" – and with the prospect of councillors moving into the realms of illegality during the coming week, the tension showed. Against a background of the miners' conference deciding on the Sunday afternoon to return to work, exponents of the second front began to crumble.

Not being a councillor, I hesitate when I demand others make choices I don't have to make – until I realise that those choices are not much different to those I and many other comrades make as trade unionists confronted by the Tories' anti-union legislation when we bring our members out on strike – as we did on March 6th in defence of and in solidarity with those councillors. Over 9,000 miners have been classified as "criminals" for defending their communities – and the London Labour Party, understanding all the implications, reiterated its support for a policy of non-compliance and therefore confrontation over rate-capping.

View of ordinary members

Writing this a week after the Conference, and therefore after the decisions taken by the GLC and ILEA to make 'legal' and therefore cutting budgets, I think it's important to say what I think reflects the view of many ordinary members. The arguments about how much money was available and new information are irrelevant. The policy agreed was one of non-compliance with the 1984 Rates Act because, even if jobs and services could be defended this year within rate-capped limits and without government grants being returned, they could not in the future. If the GLC and ILEA leaderships wanted different tactics or fall-back positions, this should have been made clear at the Conference and at the Special Conference before that. Instead the movement – we didn't campaign enough – and individuals – who supported Party policy – are being used as scapegoats.

We don't know what the end result of the fight against rate-capping in the boroughs will be. What we do know is that, just as the miners needed our support and solidarity, so we must stand by those councillors taking a stand on our behalf. Sitting in conferences passing resolutions is never enough – in Lambeth the mass support on the streets on Thursday night (7th March) mobilised by the trade unions, community groups and CLPs put flesh to the resolutions and raised the morale of activists and councillors alike.

Back at the Conference, resolutions on further conferences to plan the next stages of the campaign against rate-capping were passed – a conference for hitlist authority CLPs, LGC and Groups on 31st March and a labour movement delegate conference "at the earliest opportunity" in conjunction with SERTUC and GLATCs on rate-capping, abolition and attacks on London Transport. The recent developments make these conferences essential so that tactics can be discussed by the whole movement and support mobilised. However, it already looks as though these conferences might get 'lost'; resolutions to the GLLP demanding they take place are urgently needed.



Narendra Makanji replies for the Executive on the Black Sections debate John Chapman

While the government attacks – not just rate-capping and abolition but the whole range of public services and social issues – dominated conference, other important debates also took place.

Marc Wadsworth is writing about the Black Section debate so I won't, except to say that in response to demand Vauxhall will be organising a conference for the CLP and Black Section Officers of the 22 CLPs with Black Sections next month to try to coordinate our responses to the threats from Walworth Road. It is also worth reporting that Militant supporters on the Regional Executive have already shown their determination to assist the launch of a witch-hunt against constituencies supporting Black Sections.

The other two major debates were on Ireland and sexual harassment.

Ireland

The Executive, after a recorded vote, was recommending support for two composites on Ireland: one clearly supporting immediate and unconditional withdrawal, the other calling for the 'Benn Bill' for withdrawal to be used as a basis for discussion and campaigning and also for representatives of the "majority of republican opinion" to be invited to attend next year's AGM. Speakers made it clear this meant Sinn Fein but, for once, the trade union vote wasn't scared off and although the first composite was narrowly defeated (by 294,000 to 305,000) the second was carried (350,500 to 229,500). With the number of LCI supporters on the Executive increased (the increase in women members elected by the Women's Conference which has a clear "troops out" position, has helped here) the terms of the composite should get implemented.

The resolution on sexual harassment originated in the Women's Committee and was put to Conference by the Executive. By the time it reached Conference it had been considerably watered down after pressure from the Fire Brigades Union that the unions would oppose anything which looked as though it was overriding established procedures. This did not prevent Valerie Wise spelling out very clearly that it was as a result of a clear case of sexual assault in the fire service that this resolution was being put. Despite it being taken first thing on Sunday morning, Conference was packed and attentive – an unusual even when something to do with women is being discussed – and the otherwise continuous sotto voce sexist mutterings from delegations unable to cope with having a woman chairing the conference almost ceased. I won't say they were humbled – the mutterings started up again soon after – but Val and the other women speakers certainly managed to embarrass them. Like all resolutions passed anywhere, the test is whether anyone does anything. The unions have been challenged to look at how they deal with cases of sexual (and racial) harassment when two (or

CONFERENCE '85

Black sections fight back

It's a sad reality that the Black person in the street cared little about the Greater London Labour Party's vote on Black Sections – the victorious and defeated were agreed on that. For, in the 12 months since the last regional annual conference when Black Sections were supported by a big majority, the London party dismally failed to build on the result. There were no new initiatives on Black unemployment, race attacks and police harassment or the time-bomb issue of the disproportionately high suspensions and expulsions of Black school children.

In such an atmosphere, the all-powerful unions, supportive of the 'Kinnock line' whatever it might be, were handed a get-out by the Militant tendency-backed Bermondsey CLP and YS motion against Black Sections. On offer was an attractive mouthful about support for 'anti-racist committees', 'Black workers who face the threat of racial violence', and 'Socialist policies to end the despair of poverty and deprivation'.. Eminently supportable political fare. But, the chances of the policies being implemented are bleak without the constitutional guarantee of vital Black representation the Black Sections were demanding. So, the dream of bold socialist initiatives, impossible in a Kinnockite Labour world, was chosen instead of Vauxhall's sober offer of some minimal but long-overdue guarantees of Black representation at London Labour party level. Against the commonsense approach were the conference's two largest battalions of votes – the T&G (120,000) and RACS (66,000). Black Sections lost by roughly 224,000 to 400,000. Reverse the figure and you have the margin in favour of the Bermondsey dream. It was a vote of infamy demoralising only to the Black Sections' supporters who had worked hard to get a different result.

A propaganda coup for Kinnock, the Militant, the Right and Enoch Powell. The two dozen CLPs locked in a grass-roots struggle with the backward Labour leadership over Black Sections are undoubtedly the better indicator of what is really important and significant. National Agent David Hughes has warned that for them to defy headquarters chiefs on the issue is to invite 'anarchy and chaos'. But, the potent rebuff is that to put off a moment longer power-sharing with Black people in the party is to invite electoral annihilation given the importance to Labour of the Black vote. Wake up Kinnock, wake up Militant. Black Sections are thriving despite conference reverses. As Black Labour activists we are being forced to train our guns on our own party leadership rather than the Tories.

Marc Wadsworth
Vice-chair, Vauxhall CLP

more) union members are involved and the GLC Labour Group (and by implication all Labour councillors) have been challenged to look at the realities of the implementation of equal opportunities policies.

Conference at the crossroads

With the strategies of the London Left of challenging the concept of the white, male, heterosexual working class being threatened from those who argue that the working class is non-black and non-gay, and with the realities of accountability and complying with conference policies having to be faced by many councillors who have in the past led the struggle on the accountability of the PLP, this conference marked a crossroads.

We are now faced with the choice of disintegrating into warring factions or developing clear strategies which will successfully confront the Tories' attempts to destroy working class organisations and communities and erode our democratic rights. Despite media distortions, I don't believe the London Left (whatever that is) has been split down the middle. The warring is restricted to a small grouping at County Hall and the rest of us must firmly resist being drawn into imitating the uncomradely behaviour emanating from there. That doesn' mean we don't take sides – but we do so through political debate and not by attacking and pressurising individuals.

The next few months could be critical; we need to build on the unity we developed during the miners' strike rather than the disunity created by Tory laws. Unless wo do, we will be ill-equipped to face the next challenge which, after rate-capping, must be the fight to retain the political levy. Strange how that managed to fall off the agenda at conference, wasn't it?

Joan Twelves,
Vauxhall CLP and Regional Executive (in personal capacity)

London rejects education cuts, ILEA not so sure

ILEA's cuts policies were soundly rejected by this year's London Labour Party Conference when the Hackney North, Streatham, LPYS Regional Committee education composite was passed. This, along with the rejection of the Socialist Education Association's motion for tertiary colleges, is the answer Bryn Davies asked for in his letter to Briefing (March).

Explicitly, the conference rejected all the cuts in the service proposed in ILEA's Budget Document, all job loss through voluntary retirement and severance schemes; all moves towards ending 16-19 education in secondary schools; all compulsory movement of ILEA staff and all disciplinary action taken by the ILEA against staff who supported the miners on 27th June 1984.

Less than enthusiastic

Although ILEA is supposed to be bound by London Labour Party policy – and indeed, in the past, Ms. Morrell has told trade union negotiators that such was the case – the present prospects are unclear. Ms. Morrell was less than enthusiastic when Inner London Teachers' Association officers approached her about London's new education policy, saying that the unions would be ill-advised to press the London resolution. The ILEA officers, when similarly approached, were not even aware that the policy had been changed. Clearly there is more to winning a battle than getting a resolution through the London Labour Party.

As for Bryn Davies, I would be happy to discuss the problems of Inner London Education with him publicly or privately. In the meantime I would leave him with this thought: is the apparent rejection of 16-19 education by London schoolchildren a criticism of sixth form education or a criticism of the 11-16 years which inadequately prepare schoolchildren for mature education? The discussion of educational change cannot take place against a background of cuts. If it does, then every innovation will simply be used to sharpen the butcher's knife. And that, Comrade Davies, is what you and the Tertiary Education Boards are doing across London with your two tier staffing allocation system based on 11-16 and 16-19 rolls.

Keith Lichman,
(Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP)

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NEWHAM 7 INNOCENT

On September 16th 1984, white racist thugs attacked Asian youths in Green Street. Five Asian youths were badly hurt. These attacks were nothing new. It has been regularly happening all over. I have myself examined and witnessed many cases. In April 1984, for example, several Asians in the Forest Gate area of Newham were seriously assaulted by white racist thugs driving around in a Ford Grenada car. They were never traced, though they were positively identified.

On April 7th 1984 Asian youths outside the Wimpy Bar in Green Street were attacked by white racists drinking in the Duke of Edinburgh pub. In defending themselves, these seven Asian youths now face affray and conspiracy charges. Customers of this pub have been known to insult black (Asian/Afro-Caribbean) people walking past the pub, thrown beer and cigarette ends at Asian women etc. The licensee of this pub has failed miserably to maintain a peaceful and orderly public house.



White racist thugs

There were a series of racist attacks on Asian people in the Upton Park and Forest Gate areas of Newham by white racist thugs; a vicious incident where a partially disabled 16 year old Asian was dragged into a car, taken to Wanstead Flats and assaulted with a hammer. There were a series of attacks in Stephens Road and Plashet Road as well. More attacks followed, orchestrated by white racists in the Duke of Edinburgh public house. Asians had billiard balls hurled at them amongst other things and on one occasion, 15-20 racists came charging out at the Asians. There is a limit to patience and the Asian youths naturally fought back in self-defence to protect themselves. The police arrived almost immediately on the scene and arrested one of our Asian young men. Over the next week more Asian youths were arrested and to prevent bail, flimsy excuses by the police were made – "still preparing their case", for example.



The charges against the seven Asians ranged from possessing offensive weapons to criminal damage. The conspiracy charge against six of the Newham 7 was dismissed at their committal hearing on September 14, 1984. As such the main charge against the seven now is that of "causing an affray" with one of the seven additionally facing a "conspiracy to cause criminal damage" charge. The seven defendants also have various individual charges against them.

Criminalise

By bringing conspiracy and affray charges the state is seeking to criminalise our boys whose only offence was to stand up for themselves and their community. The police treatment of the Newham 7 has to be contrasted with their total failure to arrest the perpetrators of the numerous attacks carried out on April 7th. In contrast, those white youths arrested in connection with the incident were neither remanded in custody nor faced bail objections by the police. *All seven defendants were subsequently charged with affray and conspiracy to cause criminal damage.*

The attacks, orchestrated by racists drinking in and around the pub still continue. The identity of the perpetrators is known but the police have failed to make arrests. In the meantime, more evidence has been emerging of attacks carried out on black people by racists drinking in the pub (families being spat at, women having drink thrown at them). *Quite clearly these attacks cannot be tolerated any more.*

Two choices

While those 'in authority' turn a blind eye to these attacks, racist attacks both in Newham and throughout London continue to increase. In November 1984 a 14 year old Afro-Caribbean youth was stabbed to death. In addition to attacks, spittings and abusive language, whole families are living in a near state of siege. In the face of this growing wave of racial violence on the one hand and total police inaction on the other, we have but two choices, either to submit to indignity, harassment, brutality and, ultimately, murder, or to defend ourselves.

The charges against the Newham 7 are a major attack on all black people and are much more than a legal issue. By ignoring the offences of the perpetrators of racial attacks while criminalising the resistance of those defending themselves from such attacks through the use of conspiracy and affray charges, the state is challenging our right to defend ourselves against racist violence to survive in this society. The challenge has to be met in an appropriate manner, by rallying to the defence of the Newham 7 on the widest possible basis. A sort of massive community mobilisation in defence of our youths that maintain the right to self-defence.

The fight of the Newham 7 is also the fight of every civilised person. The Newham 7 stood for their oppressed community. We, in turn, must stand by them. We must demonstrate yet again, that we cannot tolerate one single attack by racist thugs on our people and will defend ourselves if the need arises. Yesterday it was the Newham 8, today it is the Newham 7, tomorrow it could be you. It is important that the community – civilised society – mobilises to defend the seven youths for it is not just they who are in the dock . . . it is all of us!

National demonstration

To bring the campaign to a climax and to ensure that the seven defendants go to the Old Bailey with the weight of local and national anti-racist opinion behind them, a call has gone out for a *national demonstration against racist attacks and in support of the Newham 7 on Saturday April 27, assembling at 1.00 p.m. at Plashet Park, Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6, (East Ham tube, District Line).*

A massive turn-out and show of strength on the day is absolutely essential as the miners' strike has vividly demonstrated the powers of state authoritarianism are growing and must be challenged.

Man Mohan,
Chair, Lewisham Asian Association,
Secretary, Deptford CLP
Black Section

Fighting the fascists in Islington and Camden

A child of ten whose parents were born in Bangladesh, was sitting in the kitchen of a flat in Caledonian Road, in the home of a friend. There was a splintering of glass and an explosion as a petrol bomb crashed onto the kitchen floor. Skinhead youths were chanting and shouting outside. The adults inside the flat dare not go outside to confront these thugs for fear of more assault and they were too frightened to go to the police fearing more harassment from the people who should be there to protect them from this kind of violent abuse. This is not an unusual occurrence for many Asian families living in inner city areas like Islington. In areas like Tower Hamlets and Newham it is far worse. Even when the attacks are not violently physical the fear from perpetual harassment forces many communities to live in a state of siege.

The Caledonian Road runs between two areas of fascist activity. To one side the Angel and Chapel Market, on the other Kings Cross to Somers Town. The border between Camden and Islington does not exist as far as fascist activity is concerned, except in the minds of certain people on the left who should know better but who use it as one excuse for inactivity.

MOSELEY'S TIME

For many years the fascists have had bursts of activity in Islington. The south of the Borough has its own pedigree nazi families going back to Moseley's time. The massive unemployment amongst the youth and poor run down estates gives the fascists fertile ground to grow. During the late '70s there was a large anti-fascist movement, mainly due to the Anti Nazi League in which people from many political groups were involved. However by 1980 the SWP who were responsible for the formation of the ANL decided to pull out of this kind of work and were followed by Labour party members who with the SWP had been the majority of activists. Islington was unfortunate to also have Patrick Harrington now on the Directorate of the National Front, organising extremely violent attacks on the remaining active anti fascists. It was members of the Islington ANL who recorded him stating that he agreed with arson attacks and other physical intimidation to subdue socialists. This was in 1981 when on the same morning at Chapel market he led an attack with bricks, clubs, bottles and knives on the socialists who would not run away and let the nazis have the streets.

It is now 1985 and the fascists have been doing just as they like. Many of them live at the Ferndale Hotel in Argyle Square, Kings Cross. For Friday and Saturday night entertainment they drink in a pub called the Agricultural Arms on the corner of Chapel Market. They meet here on Saturdays to do their paper sales. Harrington is often with them. Their presence in both Camden and Islington brought a renewed wave of violence to the streets. They smashed up other pubs, terrorised local people, particularly black people. Large mobs of these thugs regularly attacked people at the Angel Tube station, both outside and on the platform. The police either pleaded ignorance of the real situation, or claimed they did not have enough people to deal with it.

KINGS CROSS WOMEN'S CENTRE

However the fascists made one big mistake. They turned their violent attentions to the Kings Cross Women's Centre and after several attacks of harassment the women decided they wouldn't put up with it any longer. In a very short space of time they organised a picket of The Ferndale Hotel which took place on 19th February. The Centre also took the Camden council to task for putting homeless families in this fascist den. Can you imagine sharing the TV lounge with a load of people wearing swastika armbands? Maurice Castles the manager of the Hotel who has protested his innocence in the whole affair was arrested in 1982 for supplying a shotgun to a group of young men who were involved in armed robberies. One of the convicted youths was the Camden organiser of the Young National Front.

The Camden council withdrew the homeless families thus losing the hotel a lot of its funds. Would they have done so if there had not been such a large demonstration of opposition and outcry? The most common response to fascist activity seems to be to walk very fast in the opposite direction and pretend to have seen nothing. Because of this attitude many communities have to suffer the violent consequences from organised racist attacks. Wherever there are organised fascist groups in an area, the racist attacks escalate as if they aren't bad enough anyway. It's all very well for socialists to say that they must concentrate on the class struggle. That's the theory so often mouthed. The fascists are unimportant in the overall struggle against the Tories etc., etc. Tell that to the child with the firebomb in the kitchen. The growth of fascism goes hand in hand with the destruction of the working class and Labour Movement. We fight on all fronts.

Anna Sullivan

NO MORE DEPORTATIONS!



On Saturday April 13th, from 11 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. at Camden Town Hall (Bibborough St., WC1) you will have a chance to join the campaigners against the racist immigration laws which not only deport 250 people every month but prevent husbands from joining their wives here and keep families divided. The Conference has been called by Campaign Against Racist Laws, the GLC Anti-Deportations Working Group, and many other black, labour movement and feminist bodies.

This movement against racist controls is wider than ever. NALGO have organised three demonstrations for Muhammed Idrish and are supporting Shahid Syed; the GLC officially oppose deportations, and Manchester City Council have gone even further by organising a demonstration; many schools have organised to stop the deportation of their pupils or their parents; churches have campaigned in their own way by organising sanctuary fasts for those threatened. The Commission for Racial Equality have confirmed in their report just how racist the immigration officers are by quoting their comments.

The conference will divide up into workshops to discuss different types of control and action against them. A lobby of Parliament has already been planned for May 21st (3.30 p.m.) to coincide with the expected verdict of the European Court that the British government's exclusion of husbands of women living here is illegal. This is one we can win, and soon.

If you can get delegated by your Labour Party or union, good! If not, come anyway and report back to them. Cost is £2 (£1 unwaged). Credentials and details from CARL, 56 Edithna St., SW9 9JP.

ADVANCE NOTICE for another conference against deportations organised by the Anti-Deportations Working Group, June 9th, probably at County Hall. Phone Caroline on 633 1273 (days) for details.

Bernard Misrahi

WESTMINSTER BRIEFING

24 hour loyalty clause in Westminster

Westminster Council is trying to introduce a 24 hour loyalty clause which if added to the disciplinary code could effectively outlaw basic trade union activity and also curtail the civil rights of people who both live and work in the borough. The two proposed clauses to be added to our disciplinary code are:

1. Action taken by an individual(s) whether during working hours or otherwise and whether relevant to his normal duties or not, which frustrate the execution of council policies.

2. Occupying and/or remaining in occupation of premises owned by or leased to the City Council (other than in the course of normal duties) without express permission and/or having been instructed to leave.

It's getting hard to remember what Westminster Council was like before Lady Porter and the right wing extremists took over. Some of you may remember that the first the staff heard from her was when a letter arrived at their breakfast table telling them (among other things) "that anyone who is considered lazy or inefficient will either be made redundant or demoted."

Then came the £8 million cut in the budget and the privatisation of several council functions, without any thought given to the cost, let alone the quality, of service.

Of course the Council were refusing to negotiate any of this despite being faced with constant opposition from council staff with industrial action and demonstrations beyond anything the borough had known before.

The high point of this opposition came with the occupation of Portland Library (which was due for closure) by both staff and residents. This closure almost lead to backbench Tory councillors overturning their leadership and voting to reopen it. A solid 28 vote majority was reduced to three.

This opposition led directly to a change in direction by the council leadership with an actual expansion in some services and a big PR campaign designed to cover the cracks.

The proposal to add the new disciplinary rules was only put to the unions during the first week in two years in which there was no major dispute taking place in the council.

With the elections coming up next year the Tories need to put a clamp on the activities of staff who have become one of the major oppositions to them. A similar clause has been added to the voluntary agencies in Westminster, who have been told that only organisations who are considered 'politically neutral' will receive funding.

Ian Wingrove,
Chair NALGO/NUPE
Joint Committee
(Personal Capacity)

Westminster South supports black sections

Westminster South has joined the select band of London constituencies which have decided not only to set up Black Sections, but to incorporate these sections into their constitutions. This was done at the Annual General Meeting on 27th March, when the GC voted to amend standing orders to enable the Black Section, when established, to send delegates to the GC and EC in the same way as the Women's Section and the Young Socialists. These delegates will have full voting rights on all matters including the selection of local government and parliamentary candidates.

The discussion, which was extremely lively, began with the reading of a letter from party headquarters, warning us of the dire consequences, up to and including disaffiliation from the Labour Party, if we went ahead with the rule change. For those of us who supported Black Sections, this seemed an added inducement to push ahead, since defying the party machine appeared an excellent way of demonstrating to our Black comrades both our sincerity and the strength of our commitment, particularly as we have few black members and no black delegates to the GC.

The opponents were the usual motley collection of right wingers, notably Mair Garside, a violent tempered member of the GLC and an aspiring Parliamentary candidate. She gave a particularly stomach turning performance, when she tried to steal Militant's clothes by suggesting that racism and racial oppression are essentially class issues. When such arguments are advanced by our Militant comrades most of us are prepared to listen sympathetically, since, while not necessarily agreeing with all they have to say, their sincerity and integrity are not in doubt, but from Mair Garside, who, I believe, cares as much about the class war as the constituency cat, such sentiments seem the purest humbug.

The debate, which, Mair Garside apart, had been of a fairly high standard up to this point, was then disfigured by a most unfortunate incident. A young member mentioned in passing that he found it disturbing that one of the most vocal opponents of the change was an active member of Poale Zion, the Zionist pressure group affiliated to the Labour Party. Surely, he asked, support for Poale Zion was incompatible with hostility to Black Sections? Whereupon another member, one Maggie Pearlstine, good friend of deputy leader Roy Hattersley, began shouting abuse, culminating in the rhetorical question, "lamp shades next?", a clear reference to the habit in nazi concentration camps of using the skins of murdered victims to make lamp shades. Mild uproar greeted this helpful comment. Even most of the right wingers present felt that whereas there are some respectable arguments to be advanced against the establishment of any separate sections or pressure groups within the Labour Party, the accusation that the supporters of such sections are nazi sympathisers and potential mass murderers is not one of them.

In the end the rule change was accepted and we await developments from Walworth Road with interest.

The next stop is to get off our butts and recruit enough Black members to form a Black section, but we hope that our stand will make this task easier.

Paula Watson
Westminster South C.L.P.

GREENWICH AGAINST LOW PAY

The main problem facing working people in Greenwich is not large rate bills but small wage packets. Greenwich Councillors, Council workers, black and women's groups and local trade unionists have joined together to fight low pay. The message of the campaign – Greenwich Against Low Pay – is that Thatcher's policies have not only created widespread unemployment but have driven wages down.

More than 16,000 workers in Greenwich earn less than £100 per week or the hourly equivalent of £2.50. Four out of five of these are women. Greenwich Against Low Pay sets out to contact those people – to make them aware of the limited rights they have – and to urge them to take collective action.

The Tory government wants to scrap Wages Councils which give a pathetically small minimum wage to some low paid workers such as hotel workers, shop assistants and hairdressers. Leaflets telling those workers how to claim their rights to holidays, sick pay and maternity pay have been distributed in Greenwich. Every leaflet has been translated into five Asian languages and the campaign recognises the severe exploitation of the black community as low paid workers. Every advert and leaflet advises low paid workers to join a trade union as, "the best way to fight for better pay and conditions".

The Low Pay Unit have trained advice



Tory GLC Councillor George Tremlett, enjoying London Labour Briefing, County Hall, March 10th.

Merton: Tenants count the cost of privatisation

In 1984 the London Borough of Merton abolished their Direct Labour Organisation and privatised the repairs and maintenance section of the Council Housing Department.

A leaked secret report to the Housing Committee on February 5th showed that in one random week alone, in November '84, private building contractors claimed £4,923.76 from the Council. Council officials estimate that £758 or 15.4% of this sum was for work not carried out, or overcharged. (Only 10% of invoices are officially checked, probably less in reality, due to staff cuts). Based on this sample, Council officials estimate the total loss could be as high as £95,000 per annum. The Merton Federation of Council Tenants & Residents Associations say the loss could be as high as £360,750. This figure is based on 15.4% of last year's total repair and maintenance bill, which according to the Housing Revenue Account was £2,342,539.

Merton Council's response to this report has been in increase the number of invoices checked from 10% to 25%. They say they will have to talk to builders to:

" . . . seek recompense for the estimated amounts overclaimed to date". (Mitcham News, 15/2/85).

Merton Tenants want to know who will have to pay the extra cost. What about the other 75% of invoices that will remain unchecked? Will criminal proceedings for fraud be instigated against the contractors involved? What compensation will be paid to tenants for the financial loss and deprivation of services they've endured?

The Chairperson of the Federation, Slim Flegg, said:

"We want to know what's happened to the cheap and efficient service we were promised with privatisation, and who is going to be held accountable for the loss of money, or will it once again fall on the backs of Council tenants, who this year will see £3 million transferred from the Housing Revenue Account to the General Rate Fund to subsidise other ratepayers?"

Merton Council's ventures into privatisation of public services began in 1982, with the hiving off of Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing. Every month since has seen the imposition of penalties for bins not emptied or roads not swept. This was followed by the privatisation of the School Meals Service, and Social Service meals to Old People's Homes, Meals on Wheels etc. Complaints about the quality and quantity of food provided by the Contractor have continued to flow in ever since. Only 20% of Merton schoolchildren now eat the meals provided.

The next service to go was School Cleaning. The first contractor's efforts created such an uproar that the Council was forced to sack the firm after only six weeks. Standards are still poor compared to those preceeding privatisation. The cleaning of Council premises has been awarded to outside contractors. An attempt to privatise the entire Council Finance Department last year was called off after a £17,000 feasibility study by consultants. The Legal Department was also considered, along with the Council's Computer Department.

The Leader of the Council is also Chair of the Merton & Sutton District Health Authority. At St Helier, the local general hospital, the domestic cleaning contract has been awarded to a firm called Mediclean. Mediclean is a subsidiary of the Hawley Group, whose other firms have the contracts for Refuse Collection, Street Cleansing, School Cleaning and Office Cleaning in Merton. The two catering contracts are held by Sutcliffes, a separate firm.

workers to help low paid workers claim their rights at work. The campaign also encourages low paid workers to claim the welfare benefits – such as Family Income Supplement – to which many are entitled. A special leaflet is aimed at people with disabilities who often take drudgery and low paid jobs because they are desperate for any jobs.

The campaign is a positive response to Tory government attacks on local democracy and living standards. In the short term it will succeed if some people are helped with their income problems. But a further long term objective is to build a broad awareness on future campaigns among all the elements of the Labour and trade union movement together with all the women and black people who have suffered most under Thatcher.

Kathryn Riley

Examples of the leaflets and campaign material are available from: Kathryn Riley, Greenwich Women's Equality Unit, 8th Floor, Riverside House, Woolwich, SE18.

LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING
Political Editor: Graham Bash, 162 Millfields Road London E.5.
Treasurer: Jim Ring

London Letters

Dear Briefing,

I have wondered for a long time whether Terry Connolly has cast himself as a proto-Cesare Borgia figure in Tower Hamlets. The recent articles by him seem to provide evidence of a 'man' obviously destined for 'great things', but racked by fears of conspiracies and imaginary enemies.

Having lived all my life in Tower Hamlets, coming from an Irish working class background, I find it amusing to be cast as the 'enemy within', simply because I am a member of Tower Hamlets LCC. To put the record straight, there are three paid-up members of Tower Hamlets LCC (including SO's John Bloxam, who probably doesn't count on the grounds that he may regard himself as a revolutionary or something!) If there are any enemies to SO's Liberal Coalition in Tower Hamlets Briefing, then they are all in Terry's head! As a career politician I think Terry understands the art of creating a bogus opposition simply to get more support for himself and the SO line. I suppose in the same way a career politician like John McDonnell has been able to out-left Ken Livingstone and cast him as the "Baddie" at County Hall!

The question that seems to delude Terry as far as an analysis of the political state of play in Tower Hamlets is the following. How a basically socially/economically unrepresentative group of white middle-class activists are going to ensure a smooth transition from an old right wing Labour Council to something on the lines of say Islington/Hackney. At the moment Terry's windbag militancy (although I do admire him as a hardworking conscientious party worker) is not a substitute for some of the real problems facing Tower Hamlets, especially in the light of the Liberal threat. In a sense, there is a credibility gap between the aspirations of the party as potential heir to George Lansbury's legacy, and the fact that the commitment of Labour Party activists to living in Tower Hamlets for a long period of time (investing their lives in the community and becoming part of it) is minimal, except if it means gaining power in the Town Hall. It is obvious that the people of Tower Hamlets will spot this, although whether they support a new Labour Party, who are as much victims of Thatcherism as the community they claim to represent, and not 'political voyeurs' has yet to be answered.

My advice to 'young Terry' is it is obvious you'll make it to being an MP one day, may be not in Bow and Poplar CLP. So you can look forward to drinking Beaujolais at the House of Commons. I think leadership is best left for those with a working class commitment, political honesty and integrity and above all an understanding that the question of leadership is ensuring that the led are marching behind you!

Yours in socialism,
Martin Mcgrath,
(Secretary, Lansbury branch,
Bow and Poplar CLP,
in a personal capacity)

Dear Comrade,

What on earth is there to stop non-white Labour voters from joining their local Labour Parties and organising to ensure that they can exert their strength in all branches of Party work?

Has it occurred to any of the advocates of 'all-black' sections in the Labour Party that such sections will inevitably, in time, provoke the formation, openly or secretly, of *anti-black* Labour Party sections?

Ken Livingstone, only a few days ago, spoke of the Labour Party as a 'Broad Church'. It *is*, and should remain, 'broad' enough to accommodate all, irrespective of colour or economic status, who want to see Labour back in power at Westminster.

Yours sincerely,
Arthur Super

WOMEN IN POLITICS
By Paul Watson and Vidya Anand

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Tony Benn

Published by the Committee for Socialist Renewal.

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Don't Stop Now!

The miners dispute is not over. The gloating capitalist media will be eating their words in time to come. The confidence of the miners to resist the State, judiciary, police, media and monetarist policies is a beacon of hope for the whole working class movement. The mobilisation of mass support for the miners and their families by the rank and file has simply highlighted the incompetence of the leadership of the Trade Union movement in the fight against the Government.

We must not allow ourselves to be turned away from the task of continuing to support the NUM just because the strike has ended at this stage. The daily practical support of money and food needs to continue for the months ahead.

The NUM needs to be re-financed as a debt of honour from the whole movement. The Miners Support Groups must maintain the links, stay in operation and evolve into rank and file Community Defence Committees. The fight has simply shifted away from the miners for the present while new fronts are opened up.

Local Government now needs defending; the public sector workers must pick up the gauntlet to continue to wear the Government down. The teachers must now be supported in their defence of education against Keith Joseph. The fight against privatisation must now be stepped up with particular support to the Barking Striking Women.

The faint hearts led by Hobsbawm will bleat their messages of 'I told you so'. They must be ignored and swept aside.

We must turn our attention to positive political campaigning

FOR the political funds
FOR jobs
FOR health
FOR education
FOR public ownership
FOR equality

We must make the demands for greater accountability of the police, a reform of the judiciary, a fundamental shift towards the democratisation of the state and private institutions.

Labour candidates should be selected now for the General Election. The two to three year campaign must be a confident, resounding, uncompromising, demand for a better life for all our people and the peoples throughout the world.

The miners struggle *is* our struggle not *was* our struggle. The women and men of our coalfield have taken giant strides towards defeating capitalism and we must fall in behind and carry on that long march.

Where mistakes are made let us learn in comradely fashion, without retribution. Where comrades stray from the path let them wander into the wilderness after de-selection.

The rank and file have caught the mood of a confident future. Let the rank and file take up the struggle. Let's see the Labour Party organised in the workplace, campaigning for support of socialism.

Let us apply all the talent and imagination at our disposal to create the organisation to achieve political power and to use that power for the sole benefit of those who create the wealth and care for society – the Working Class.

Don't stop now.

Geoff Dixon

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LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!

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Next London editorial on Monday 22nd April at 6.30 p.m. at County Hall.

Typeset by Bread N Roses [TU] and by Lithoprint [TU]. Printed by Wernham Printers Ltd [TU].

Published by Labour Briefing, 162 Millfields Road, London E5.

20p

LABOUR BRIEFING

NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

No 16 APRIL 1985



D. Sinclair/MILITANT

LIVERPOOL ON THE FRONT LINE

Liverpool's Budget Day on March 7th was marked by a demonstration and rally made up of tens of thousands of Merseysiders. Not only was the demonstration notable for its size but there was also an atmosphere of confidence and combativity.

It was obvious that the labour movement in Liverpool did not feel the gloom and despondency which the Tories must have hoped for after the end of the miners' strike. At the budget meeting the Labour Group stuck to its clear mandate from the District Party and refused to set a rate.

In the coming weeks it will be an acid test of Labour councillors in the rest of the country to match the resolve of the labour movement on Merseyside which is wholeheartedly behind the position of defending jobs and services.

Although socialists in Liverpool may criticise aspects of the 1984 budget settlement and certainly feel that severe mistakes, particularly on race issues, have been made since, there is a clear lesson to be learnt from the experiences of the last two years.

A Labour Council which is prepared to take on the Tories can generate massive support from many sections of the broader labour movement. Those district councils which are threatened by the rate-cap should learn the lesson urgently and refuse to bow to the Tory dictats.

A united campaign by even a handful of councils could be the launching pad for a renewed fightback against the Tory government. Socialists in Liverpool will carry on the fight to save our city from the twin disasters of a massive loss of jobs and the collapse of public services.

Liverpool Labour Party is seeking unity with all those district councils who originally committed themselves to the refusal to set a rate. If this support does not develop we are clearly committed to fighting on, even if we must struggle alone.

Kevin Feintuck,
Liverpool District Labour Party

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

....but at the GLC BETRAYED BUT NOT BEATEN!

The events at the GLC over the last fortnight have been distressing to everybody involved and have shattered the unity of the London Labour Party. I want to explain my position but in doing so I want to depersonalise the whole affair. It is desperately important that we concentrate on and learn from the issues of principle and socialist strategy thrown up by the GLC rate-capping and no longer be drawn into the macho/confrontational debate the capitalist media have engineered.

On October 1 1984 I gave Ken Livingstone a detailed note on what I considered the GLC's strategy should be on rate-capping. Ken discussed and agreed the line set out in my note. I do not normally release confidential notes but my GMC permitted the release of this one because my personal integrity has been impugned. The note was to fully brief the GLC Leader on the likely scenario at the GLC between October 1984 and March 1985. It reads as follows:—

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 possibly bring about its downfall. In addition it is crucial that in the long term we maintain the credibility of our administration as a left socialist advance.

Can we survive by complying but without cuts?

It has been hinted, ironically from two different points in County Hall, that with a measure of financial juggling we could comply with the government and survive into next year without cuts. From one side Maurice Stonefrost may suggest that the government's demand for about £50 million worth of cuts is manageable by financial manoeuvres plus zero growth next year. From the other side Reg Race has repeatedly (and possibly too publicly knowing how leaky the Policy Committee is) floated the collapsing of the capital fund to give us sufficient funds to carry on spending despite the government setting a maximum GLC precept.

I am strongly opposed to either of these attempts to cling onto office. If we go down Maurice Stonefrost's path we will eventually be led into cuts and certainly a drying up of resources to maintain existing or develop new policy areas. 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. The Race option of using the capital fund to survive is also seriously flawed.



Voting the same way. Left to right, Mike Ward, Ken Livingstone, John McDonnell. County Hall, March 10th. John Chapman

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 picked 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 try as best we can to push the GLC into joining forces with them. For us to be able to use the capital fund and other 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 thus enabling Jenkin to put down more 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. Though obviously the sight of a left GLC victorious over a Tory government would be a tremendous boost for the movement, comrades will understand with strong, sympathetic support if we take a firm stand and are beaten. However, 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 or even 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."

I adhered to the line agreed by Ken in the October 1st note. Ken and I spoke at a whole series of meetings urging support for the no-rate positions. We have written articles and issued statements supporting it. The London Labour Party eventually endorsed the no-rate policy at two party conferences.

What changed in the last week prior to our budget day? Nothing changed in terms of poli-

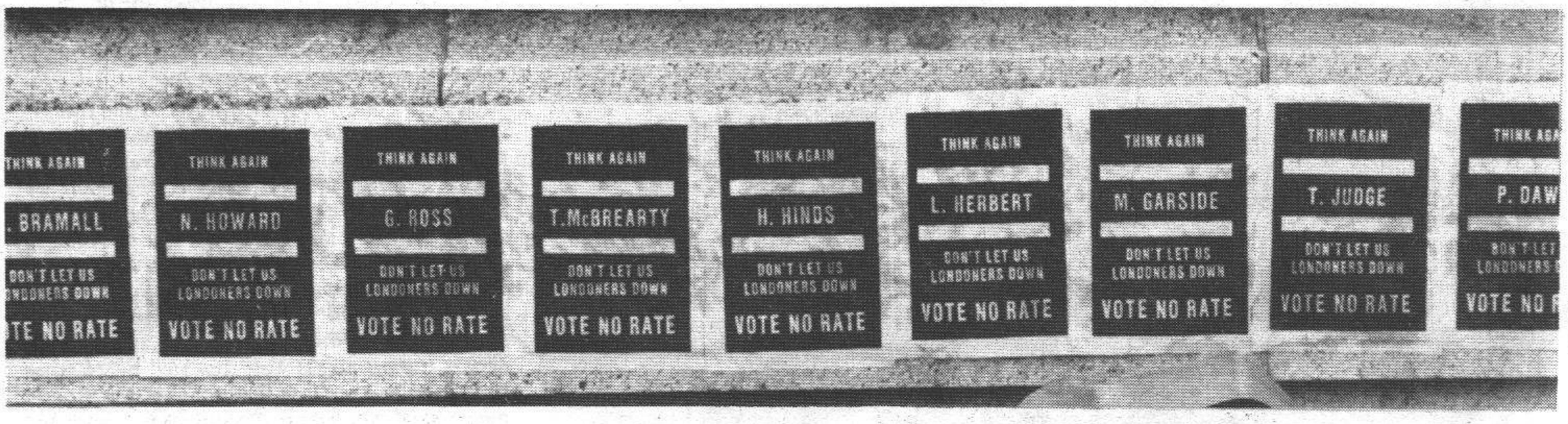
ILEA BOTTLES OUT!

It will come as no surprise to seasoned County Hall watchers that the ILEA was among the first to sell out in the fight to defend local services. The GLC caved in three days later.

On Thursday 7th March, by 27 to 20, the ILEA members voted to break with London Labour Party policy, to break with the rate-capped boroughs fighting the government and to set a legal rate. To compensate for the £24 million cuts, which GLC officers stated would follow, the decision also involved the undertaking to raid the building fund and the balances created by ILEA's underspending (i.e. cuts) for the £24 million shortfall. The successful amendment was moved by Alex Mackay. Livingstone spoke strongly in favour of the amendment and voted in favour then voted *against* the legal budget which was based on the 'McKay amendment'. Frances Morrell, Ruth Gee and Steve Bundred did the same.

If the ILEA is successful in avoiding more cuts this year (and there are plenty of reasons for scepticism on this), then next year, the year of the direct elections to ILEA, there will be no hidden money to offset rate-capping and drastic cuts will be unavoidable – if the ILEA members stay legal. If they decided to break the law next year, and no-one seriously expects it, then they will be on their own because everyone else who is fighting, is fighting this year. Meanwhile the ILEA and the GLC have both handed the government a stunning propaganda victory. Only Mr Kinnock, with his legalistic posturing, seems pleased with the result.

Keith Lichman, Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP



tical principles. We knew that with only a majority of four we could only succeed with the no rate option if the GLC Tories could be encouraged to abstain. After two months work I secured the week before our budget day a legal opinion from the GLC's barrister which gave the Tories this choice. The Tories themselves obtained a similar but stronger legal opinion. There was the real possibility therefore of the GLC delivering the no rate position.

When news of the legal opinions got round County Hall panic set in amongst a number of Labour members. As I predicted in October, Maurice Stonefrost, the GLC Director-General and Reg Race went to Ken with both their proposals for the GLC copping out on the rate-capping struggle. On the Friday evening before the Annual London Labour Party Conference Ken raised these proposals with me and I rejected them.

At Party Conference that weekend I informed Conference of the GLC's exact financial position and warned of the deals that were on offer. I made it clear that the offer to increase the GLC's borrowing to buy the GLC out of the rate-capping struggle could only be made and fulfilled with the government's approval, formal or tacit. I said then that we must reject these offers and stand firm. The Conference reaffirmed its commitment to the no-rate strategy.

On Monday when I returned to County Hall for the Labour Group meeting, we found that a GLC budget had been prepared and sold by Ken to enough members of the Labour Group to defeat the no-rate position.

A group of ten comrades refused to renege on Labour Party policy and throughout the budget process voted against any rate. All the budgets proposed involved cuts or compliance with abolition which we rejected. A budget and rate was eventually moved by the Labour right and with the support of the Tories was agreed.

The Right's budget is basically no different from Ken's and we will be able to protect the GLC's jobs and services possibly to the end of the year.

The Notts Area of Rate-capping

The GLC has now been effectively bought out of the rate-capping fight, leaving the boroughs to stand and take on the government. Effectively the GLC has become the Nottingham area of this dispute. Even Thatcher has welcomed the GLC's decision to set a rate and Ken Livingstone has been congratulated on being a responsible politician by the capitalist press. I was personally distressed when I arrived home to see my children watching Ken on television calling me a systematic liar – misleading him on the financial position of the GLC. In fact Ken has had my note of October 1st and has been regularly briefed on our finances. All GLC councillors have had detailed financial papers weeks before setting our budget day. As my note of October 1st described, we all knew that the GLC's financial position was better able to withstand rate-capping this year. The whole purpose of the rate-capping campaign was to unite the GLC with the boroughs so that the government could not pick off the boroughs this year and then turn on an isolated GLC later or even next year. It was to unite the strong with the weak to protect all our communities.

Similarly the attempt to blame the borough leaders was a distortion. The line was clearly agreed by Ken that the rate-capping campaign would be a sequential development of struggle over a limited period.

*The Scottish Authorities on March 5th.

*GLC and ILEA on March 7th.

*And the boroughs passing motions in their council chambers on March 7th which would be the same as Liverpool's last year leaving them open to legal challenge in late March or early April.

In the fortnight before the GLC budget day Ken and I met David Blunkett and reconfirmed this line. All the councils including Scotland, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and the London boroughs have held to the agreement. Only the GLC and ILEA have reneged.

Next stage of the struggle

Although the GLC now has a budget which will protect its own jobs and services the GLC has broken ranks with the boroughs and with London Labour Party policy. This betrayal could demoralise the boroughs and some may also collapse as a result. Nevertheless it is critical that the party's support should now be thrown behind the boroughs which are standing firm.

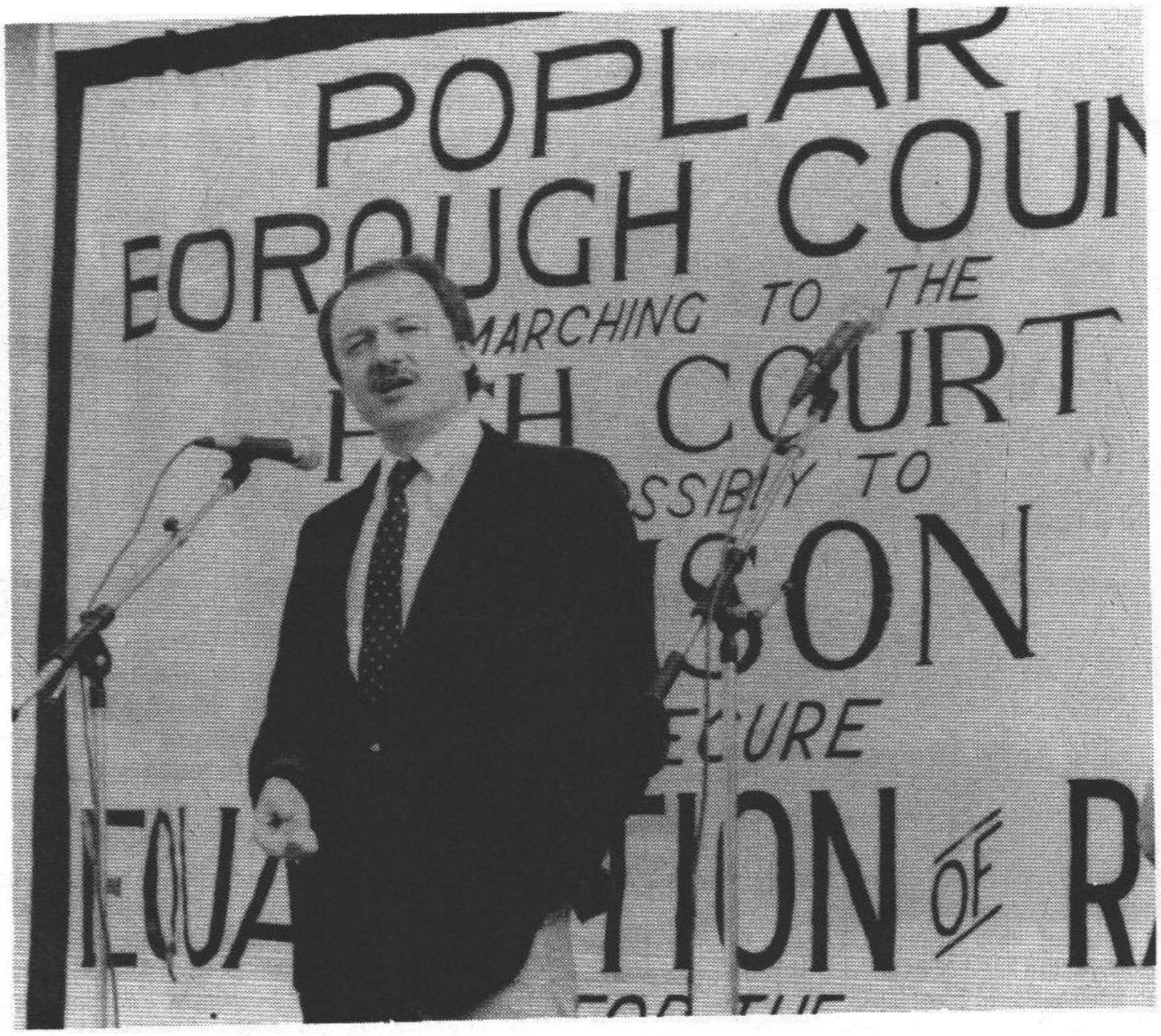
The next six weeks are critical. The government is already prompting legal actions against Islington and Hackney. We must mobilise support in the community and in the trade unions for direct action, occupations, and strikes to support these councils.

At the GLC a purge and witch-hunt has already been launched against the ten comrades who stood firm on party policy. The GLC Policy Committee on a motion moved by Livingstone has taken all control of the GLC campaign out of my hands. Similarly the new centre/right realignment around Ken Livingstone is arriving to remove left comrades from their positions in the Group at the Group AGM in six weeks time. The GLC battle is over. The party desperately wants and needs us to unite against the Tories. There should be no purges or witch-hunts of the ten comrades who supported party policy. If the campaign of victimisation continues it will destroy the left in London and play into the hands of the right wing and the Tories. We appeal therefore for unity and no purges, no witch-hunts, and urge CLPs to express this view to the GLC Labour Group and the Regional Executive.

John McDonnell,
Deputy Leader, GLC

KEN LIVINGSTONE REPLIES

Whenever I spoke on ratecapping at the GLLP EC or made any public statement I pointed out that given our narrow majority of four I did not expect that it would be easy to carry the no-rate policy, and if a ratecap was imposed on the GLC then we would fall back to the position of a deficit budget to preserve jobs and services. I consistently pointed out to the Labour leaders at these meetings the likely impact on the morale of the whole campaign against ratecapping if the GLC was seen to fail at an early stage, but this was always brushed aside.



At the Labour leaders meeting on 19th February the document MC(85)(11) was agreed without dissent. It stated that the form of words to be used in Council motions on 7th March should simply state that *'it will be impossible for the authority to make a rate'* and called on the government to return Rate Support grant to penalised Labour councils. Lest there was any doubt, paragraph 7 spelt out the meaning of such wording:

'One thing an authority must not do is revolve in terms that it will not make a rate for 1985/6. The form of wording suggested above is to the effect that as at the 7th March the authority considers that it will be impossible for it to make a rate, but that is not a declaration of a fixed intention not to make a rate, which would be unlawful.'

The GLC officer present drew John McDonnell's attention to the fact that such a policy would isolate the GLC and ILEA. When John McDonnell returned from this meeting to the GLC he informed me that Merseyside and South Yorkshire would not be going illegal *but that the London boroughs were standing firm behind GLLP policy.*

Although most of the London Labour borough leaders (including Ted Knight) were present, there was no vote against although this was completely contrary to the policy of the GLLP decided at our special conference on 19th January.

When on 11th December the government announced that our rate cap limit was 36.5p, I met John McDonnell and questioned him on the likely effects. He stated it meant £140 million of cuts and stuck to that position when I questioned him. He adhered to this figure at the group meeting on Monday 7th January.

In the late afternoon of Thursday 28th February, Reg Race asked to see me in order to voice his fears that the officer paper to be published the following day (FGP 1000 showing £30 million cuts) was not in line with party policy and the state of our finances was such that instead of facing £140 million of cuts we could have £25 million of growth. I asked him to prepare a document outlining these facts and was shown a very rough draft late on Friday 1st March. When I asked John McDonnell to comment both on Reg Race's proposals and FGP 1000 he questioned their accuracy and we did not reach agreement about the facts.

ANTAGONISED MEMBERS OF LABOUR GROUP

Following Ted Knight's attack at the GLLP conference, John McDonnell then launched a public attack alleging that a deal was being done between the government, our officers and myself. Whilst this is not the first time someone has lied about me it could not have come at a worse time in terms of maintaining party policy and group unity. It helped stoke up the press coverage of a Labour split and taken together with Ted Knight's attack it antagonised many members of the Labour group.

At the Policy Committee and at the following Labour group meeting on Monday 4th March, *I proposed that we should refuse to set a rate but that if it became certain that we could not carry that position in the full GLC and there was a danger of a Tory or Alliance budget being set then we should fall back to the position of adopting the Programme Office budget based on the maximum precept and £25 million of growth.* After a long and difficult debate my proposals were defeated by 24 votes to 18 and the group voted to adopt the growth budget and maximum precept in line with the decisions of South Yorkshire and Merseyside Councils.

I have no doubt that the bitterness caused by the attacks of Ted and John at the conference plus the feeling that the group had been deceived both about the true financial position and the intentions of the boroughs was the cause of the defeat of my proposal that we should refuse to set a rate.

John McDonnell however had a different view as to the cause of our defeat. The next morning LBC broadcast an interview with John McDonnell in which he alleged that I had deliberately produced the growth budget in order to undermine the no-rate position.

Not only does that charge overlook the fact that I had asked him on 12th February to obtain the legal opinion for the Tories but it also ignores the fact that he promised that a fall back budget would be prepared.

On 18th February Barrie Stead (GLC Member for Fulham) had written to John and me in the following terms:

'I remain very anxious that a full range of options is available to the Group. Over a month ago, John agreed that a budget would be prepared on the basis of the legal maximum.'

FALL-BACK PROPOSAL

I asked John McDonnell how he wished to reply to this and he drafted in his own handwriting and I signed the following reply on 25th February, just 7 days before he was to condemn me for having brought the fall-back position to group:

'Dear Barrie,

Thank you for your letter dated 18/2/85 on the GLC's budget '85/86.

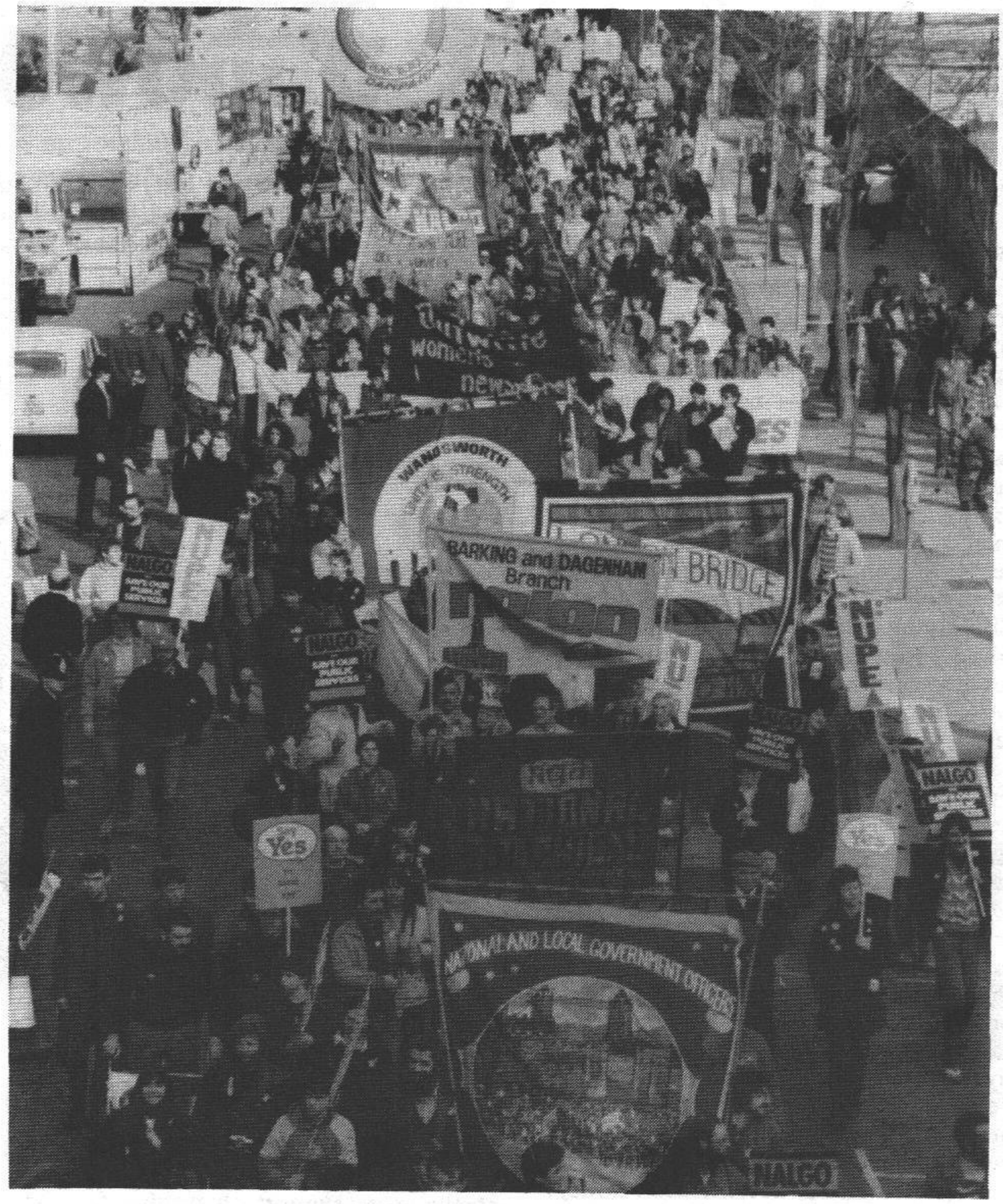
As you can see from Maurice Stonefrost's paper FGP 999, the Director-General has prepared a route through the budget process which the officers are recommending. I will ensure that if the 'no rate' option falls in the Council

Chamber on budget day there will be a fall-back proposal available which will put us as an administration in the best position to protect services and jobs in the coming year.'

Throughout the ILEA budget meeting on Thursday, 7th March, and the first day of the GLC meeting on 8th March, I continued to vote against setting a rate along with the other no-rate supporters.

When we continued the meeting on Sunday I was informed that it was the intention of about 12 members of the group to ensure that a rate would be set and that if by the end of the day the Labour group position had not carried then they would vote for the best remaining option on the agenda. I reported this to the group during an adjournment of the GLC and made it quite clear that I did not believe that the party, the Trades Unions or the public would understand our tactics if the GLC managed to end up with a rate below the legal maximum. I asked both wings of the group to strike a compromise that recognised that it was no longer possible to prevent a rate being set and therefore we should adopt the growth budget which had been agreed at the group.

The new General Secretary of the Labour Party, Larry Whitty, persuaded the right not to vote for a Tory or Alliance budget but to have one last chance to carry the growth budget. When this was moved by Steve Bundred 10 members of the group still opposed the compromise thus finally defeating the group position. On the next vote a dozen Labour members supported Barrie Stead's 33.8p proposal which carried with Tory and Alliance support and 26 Labour members, including myself, voting against.



John Chapman

Demonstration against rate-capping, March 6th.

LESSONS

Although these events have been a major setback for the party, there are many important lessons which can be drawn out and learnt from. Firstly, it was a tactical disaster for the rate-capped councils to proceed on the basis of achieving maximum unity by not debating what we would actually do when the crunch came. I repeatedly warned other council leaders of the media impact of a spectacular GLC defeat at the beginning of the struggle but this was usually dismissed with the statement that nobody expected the GLC to stand firm anyhow!

We also overlooked the fact that we did not bring together the councillors concerned. We relied on endless meetings of leaders who reported back to groups and parties. It would have done a lot to build the confidence of councillors if we had brought them together to discuss the strategy as it evolved. We also needed to bring the trade unions and CLPs into such meetings. Too often the movement which needed to unite to defeat rate-capping remained isolated in its constituent parts.

Some council leaders made the mistake of exaggerating their ability to deliver what was being agreed and this led to the unions and CLPs expecting more than we honestly knew we could deliver. A party that seeks to transform society needs to start by being honest with itself and making accurate assessments of our own strength and the strength of our opponents. We wish to defeat the government and make speeches to that effect but in itself this does not create the objective conditions which are necessary.

MORE HONEST APPROACH

We also need to develop a more honest approach to tactics and strategy. Once we knew by Sunday afternoon that we could not stop a rate being set we needed to adjust our tactics so as to achieve the best possible budget rather than continue to pretend the battle could still be won. Any fool can lead an army to defeat. Real leadership requires that you recognise when a battle has been lost and withdraw in a way which minimises your casualties. It was only the intervention of Larry Whitty which prevented us ending up with a Tory budget which contained real and painful cuts.

We need to remember that those who control access to information have a duty to share that openly with the rest of the movement. Hiding the real position about the council's finances did not change the facts and simply made it more embarrassing when the truth was known. Telling the public that government policies will lead to immediate massive cuts creates real problems for the credibility of the party when those cuts don't happen. We all suspected that the government would set this year's rate limits at a level which would allow *most* councils to get by and the real cuts would come in subsequent years. We should have spelt this out honestly so that we built the opposition to the principle of the legislation thus undermining the government's claim that councils could live with these limits this year.

Undoubtedly leaders often fail and sometimes betray but to see socialist defeats simply as individual weakness denies the effect of economic and social forces on any political struggle. Why John McDonnell launched the attacks on me that he did I can only speculate on. Perhaps he feared that I might launch an ultra-left attack on him because he had compromised too much at the 19th February meeting of the LGIU or that he had failed in his desire to 'push as much money out of the building as possible' because he had worked against rather than with Reg Race. Whatever the reason his actions split the group, split the party, opened our flank to attack from the media, set back the whole rate-capping campaign and prevented us from having a lot of fun at Patrick Jenkin's expense when it became known he had set our precept figure too high.

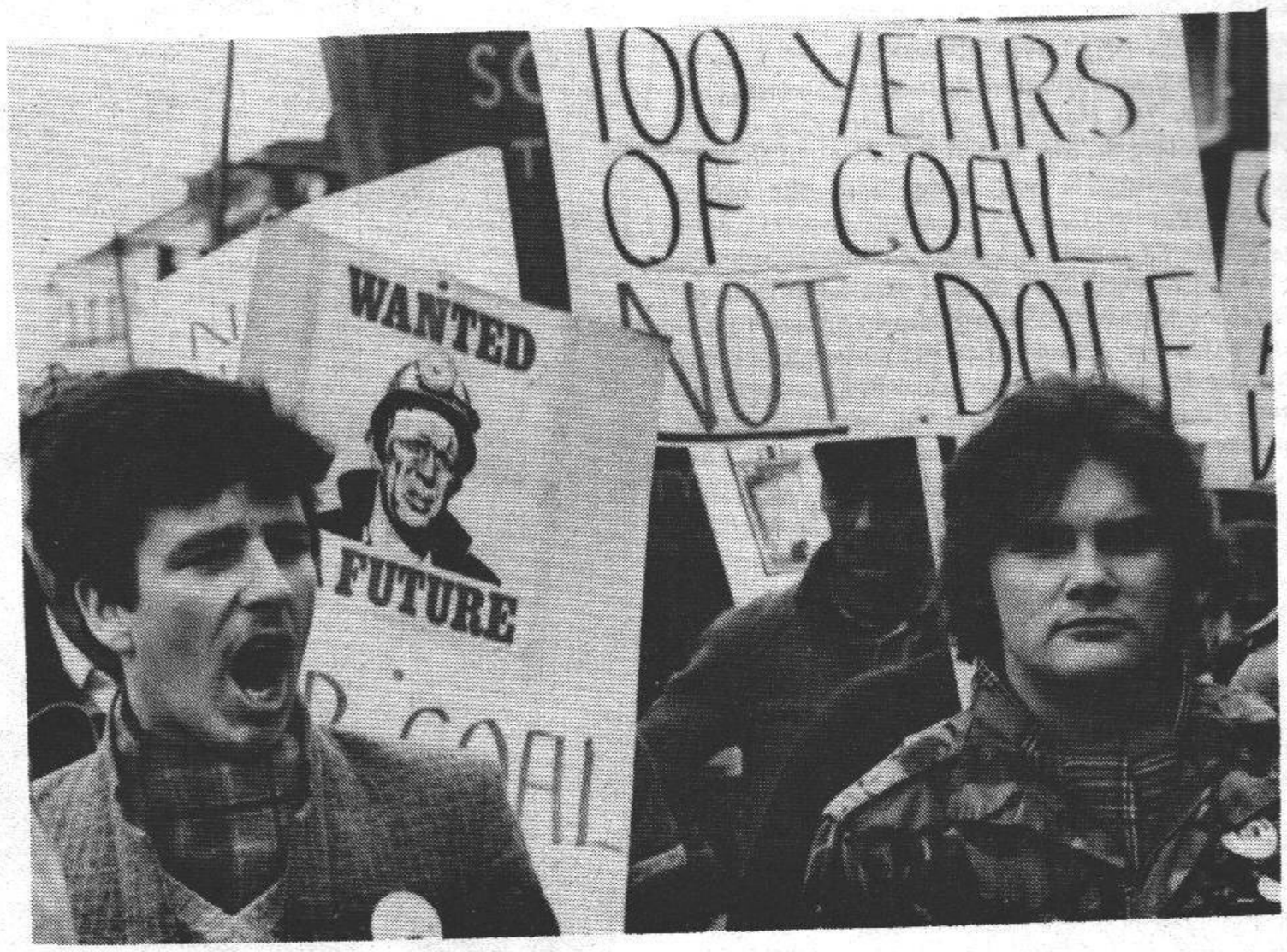
Against that list of losses the only gain to be recorded was that of his own position on the left of the party. But perhaps we are both equally to blame for as he said in his letter of 1st October, 'we never seem to have the opportunity to talk about tactics or strategy'. We need to ensure that we avoid similar mistakes in the future by relying less on leaders and deputy leaders and devolving power and information a lot further throughout the movement.

Ken Livingstone

Beaten but unbowed!

Brian Jones
(Swansea Labour Party)

The miners' strike, after 12 months, has ended with defeat. Why was it lost, who is to blame, what are the consequences? The blame for this defeat, not only of the miners but of the whole working class, lies with the Labour Party and TUC leaderships. From Willis to Basnett, Kinnock to Healey, these are the traitors and scabs who allowed the NUM to be isolated and they must be replaced.



Stefano Cagnoni

There is victory, however. It is a victory for the courage and determination of the miners, for the women of the mining communities, and for the leadership of Arthur Scargill. This combination held onto the strike for 12 months against the savage attacks of the Tories, the police, the media and massive scabbing by the labour movement leaders, and has emerged intact. Scargill's refusal to make the NUM complicit in closing pits by a return on a "compromise agreement" (TUC-style) is a new feature in British politics. Here is a leadership that is prepared to lead and fight to the finish on the basic issues. Despite this defeat, it is clear that the fight will go on.

Many comparisons have been made between the miners' strike and the General Strike of 1926, with dire warnings that defeat now would have consequences similiar to '26.

In 1926, total leadership of the strike was given to the General Council, which was the line of the Communist Party. So when the sell-out came, the class-struggle forces around AJ Cook were completely marginalised and were incapable of giving any alternative lead. The result was the break-up of the miners' union, with widespread blacklisting and the emergence of the scab Spencer union.

The situation is not the same today. While it is not clear how the division between the NUM and the Notts Area will be resolved, the NUM is quite solid and the formation of a scab union is unlikely. There will be victimisation, but it will be fought. The NUM leadership did not give away control of the strike nor did it capitulate, in fact the Scargill current remains the greatest militant leadership in the British labour movement since 1926. The miners have come out beaten but unbowed.

After 1926, mass struggles went onto a much narrower field. Scargill has welcomed the broadening of the miners' fight to encompass the struggles of the oppressed – from women's struggles, through to the peace movement, CND and into the Labour Party. With British imperialism in deepening crisis (unlike restabilisation after 1926) these struggles will also deepen and become increasingly intertwined. The coming battles, for the pits and otherwise, will now be more defensive and there will be retreats and defeats as workers face the prospect of fighting without organised support. But this strike has begun the process of forming a class-struggle leadership across the labour movement, and we must look to ways of helping to organise it.

Why did the strike end when it did, and why did the move to end it come from an apparently solid area, South Wales? The failure to mobilise the South Wales labour movement in support of the miners lies with the Wales TUC and Wales Labour Party. Both did nothing for, and on occasion obstructed, the mobilisation of the mass support that exists for the miners in South Wales. But the problems run deeper and the actions of the South Wales NUM Area Executive need examining. There are a series of key points in the strike which show what happened. The June 12 Wales-TUC Day of Action was scabbed on by the TUC General Council and went off at half-cock. The writing was on the wall, but was ignored. June 12th was the only time the South Wales Executive appealed to other workers to take action in support of the miners. Subsequent to the Battle of Orgreave, serious attempts to stop the coal/ore convoys on the M4 by mass picketing ended. The stated reason was lack of money. But there were later statements by Kim Howells, spokesperson for the South Wales NUM Area Executive saying that Orgreave had proven that mass picketing didn't work.

Sequestration

Sequestration of South Wales' funds was met with the NUM's Pontypridd office being barricaded by 2000 miners, but no broader mobilisations. The occupation of the cranes at Port Talbot docks in September had the potential to stop all movement of coal/ore to the steelworks, and could have been the focus to go onto the offensive with mass action. Very few miners were mobilised to defend those on the cranes.

The Wales Congress in Defence of the Mining Communities was formed in October 1984. It had the official support of the South Wales Area NUM Executive and involved the Wales Labour Party and MPs, Plaid Cymru, the Communist Party, the Churches, the TGWU, NUPE and many Miners'/Women's Support Groups. But its founding statement did not mention the decisions of TUC Congress in support of the miners, nor any call for a campaign to implement them. Dai Smith wrote in Marxism Today that the Congress was the new popular front to defend the Welsh communities. Because of this weight of official support and the fact that its orientation was to appeal/lobby the NCB and Tories, the Congress was an obstruction to organising mass action involving the miners and their supporters. The leadership of the mass action/Scargill current in the South Wales NUM was too weak to challenge the politics of the Congress.

Return to work

So when the idea of a return to work without agreement was floated in January 1985 by Kim Howells, no alternative strategy was presented to the miners who wanted to continue the fight. By February, some rank and file miners even said they were glad to have a few scabs in their pit – picketing them out was at least something to do! The consistent line in the politics of the South Wales Area NUM Executive is a refusal to organise mass action, of miners or any other workers, to beat the Tories.

Huw Edwards, Chair of Tower NUM, said

No going back!

Now that the miners' strike is over, it is important to look back at the development of the women's support groups over the past year, to see what they achieved and to consider their future. The practical achievements of the groups have been plain to see – the running of food kitchens, collection and distribution of food, collection of funds and providing other kinds of material help in the communities, have all helped to alleviate the great hardships suffered by all of those involved in the strike. But it is the change and development of the women as individuals and as organised women which is of greater long-term significance.

For many of the women involved there is a knowledge that their lives will never be the same again, that they will never be able to return to the role they played within the family before the strike began. Their experiences have widened their consciousness politically, socially and personally; they have done things that they never believed they could (or even should) do, initially because the situation demanded it of them, but eventually because they began to enjoy and value their involvement and their contribution. They found that they could actually affect what went on around them in a positive way.

The events of the strike widened their political awareness of the functions of the state, of the role of the political parties and the trade unions and challenged many of their previously held traditional, narrow and often prejudiced views. On a wide range of issues, ideas about the law, violence, justice and truth have changed, this in turn determining attitudes towards other people in the world also in struggle. Encouraged by the expressions of solidarity that the miners received from all over the world, many women now know about the problems in El Salvador and S. Africa for example and can identify with others fighting oppressiion. Awareness of their own personal ability and the great new confidence that this has brought has created an army of women who know from hard experience that they have the power to stand up and fight for their rights and they will do this not only for the community but for themselves within their own marriage and family relationships. They have demanded and won the respect of men throughout the British coalfields and far further afield.



Women from pit communities picket Florence Colliery. John Harris (IFL)

It is doubtful if there has ever before been the development of a women's movement to this extent – and although it came about as a response to a specific situation, it is most important that now that it is in existence, that it is not lost. It is unlikely that all the women who were involved actively in supporting the strike will continue to meet and organise, but there is definitely a large section who feel now that there are vital issues to be campaigned on – the continuing problems created by the strike, the men who have been sacked and those still in prison, and the broader issues of the health service, rate-capping and the nuclear question.

On Saturday March 9th about 5,000 or so women from the support groups gathered at a rally in Chesterfield to celebrate International Women's Day. After a full year of hardship and bitter struggle and after being forced back to work without the victory we fought for, there was no sense of pessimism or defeat at that rally. On the contrary, it was a great exhibition of optimism, defiance and unity. Women from the length and breadth of Britain had travelled there to demonstrate that as a force of organised women they are determined to continue the battle. For them there can be no going back.

Maureen Douglass
(Hatfield Main Women's Support Group Doncaster)

after the return, "with only 8% of South Wales miners scabbing, it was bitterly wrong to go back with no agreement and no guarantees that those sacked would get their jobs back. When 40% were back, then it was time to make a reappraisal. The South Wales Area Executive thought it could achieve more with pressure tactics. The effect of this was to sideline the majority of our membership which should have been mobilised in mass picketing. That was Scargill's policy, not South Wales', and his lead was exemplary throughout.

"I think perhaps his only mistake was to succumb to pressure from the TUC and not appeal over the heads of the trade union leaders. Unity gave the space to the TUC not to carry out Congress agreements. But South Wales miners are solid behind Scargill, and the fight will go on."

There is no doubt that the South Wales NUM Area Executive wanted to win this strike and that it did not consciously undermine it. The South Wales miners decided to go back not through starvation, but for want of a lead. The key issue now is an amnesty for all.

MODEL RESOLUTION

Neil Kinnock's equivocal stand on the miners' strike has been a disgrace.

He has tried to equate miners' efforts to defend themselves with police violence. He has said 'commercial considerations' should govern pit closures. It took him ten months to get onto a picket line.

Miners are disgusted with Neil Kinnock's performance. Yet many of them have joined the Labour Party in order to work with the rank and file who have backed the miners, and in order to challenge Neil Kinnock's equivocation within the Labour Party.

Labour Party activists must not let those miners down, or let the lessons of the miners' strike go unlearned.

We therefore appeal to the Campaign Group of MPs, and to Tony Benn in particular, to challenge Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley for the Labour Party leadership this year, centring the challenge around the lessons of the miners' strike.

We reject the notion that this would be divisive or destructive. The responsibility for any division rests with Neil Kinnock. The Labour Party has decided on a mechanism for annual election of Party leader, and that mechanism was designed to be used.

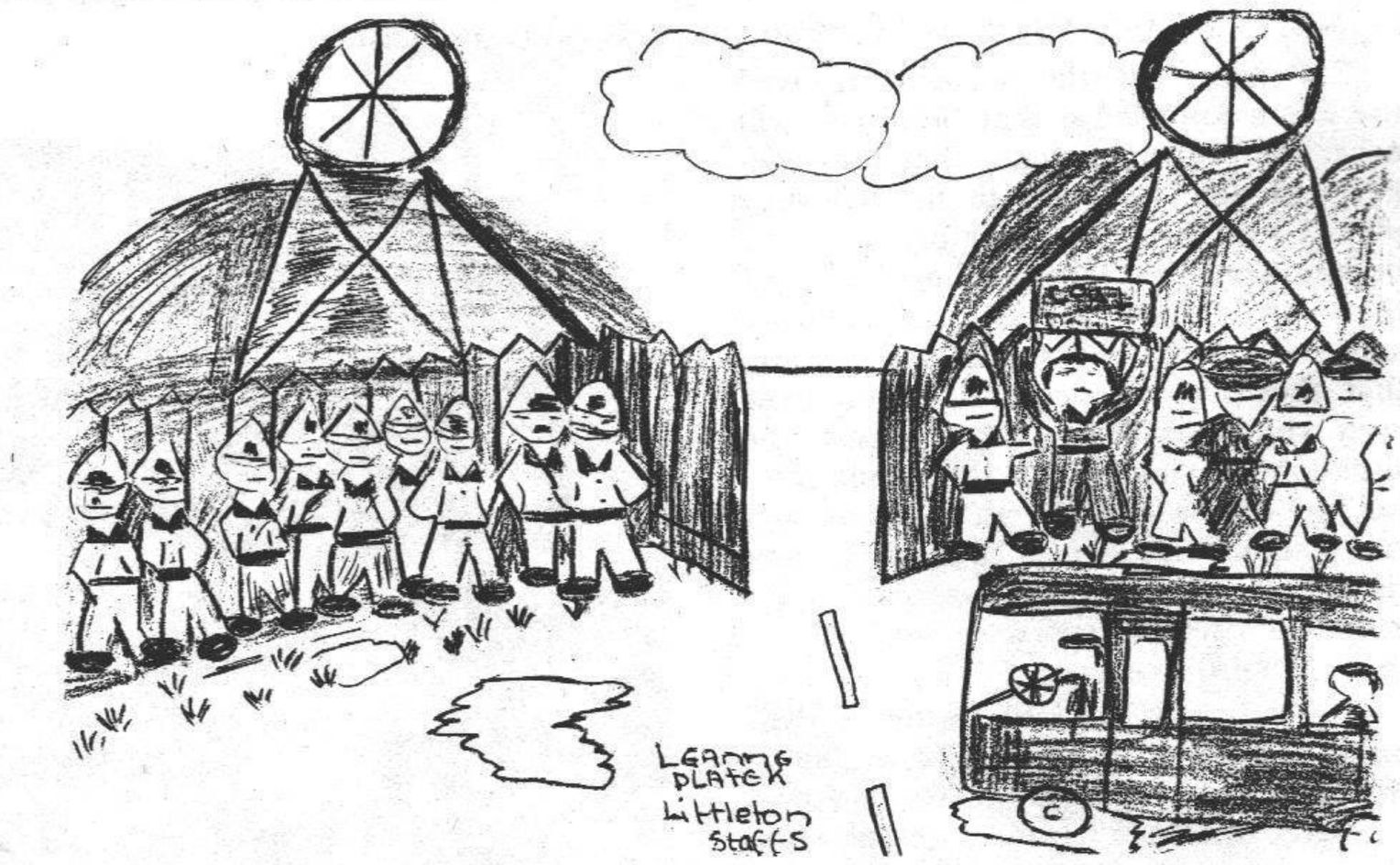
CHILDREN AND THE MINI

Much has been written about women's involvement in the miners' strike. They have been on picket lines, organised meetings, demonstrations, national conferences, canteens, collections. They have spoken at rallies all round the country. After some initial misgiving, the womens' action is accepted as having been the backbone to the strike.

Little has been said, however, about the activities of children in support of the strike. There has been a general feeling that children should be shielded from the harsh realities of industrial action. They are often seen as too immature, too politically naive to know what is really going on.

It is clear from a few brief examples that this is not necessarily the case. As Cathrine Church, treasurer of Bentley Women's Action Group said, "you will find children of all ages who actively supported the strike."

Right at the beginning of the strike there was a report on the radio that 150 Scottish pupils had walked out of school to join the miners' picket, only to be turned back by the police. At the beginning of November, some Barnsley miners came down to London to collect at Clapham. They were surprised at the generosity of Londoners and even more amazed when a group of kids tipped their Guy Fawkes collection into the miners' bucket.



"We are the miners' kids"

Miners' children invented songs such as "We are the miners' kids" and, in good, time for Xmas, "While miners watched their pits by night".

In September I received a letter from my nephew who is twelve years old and lives in Stepney:

"Dear Martin, Thank you for sending me the miners' stickers. Now my school is well and truly behind the miners. But now I am short of stickers and other true blue schools have to be hit. So please can you put some more stickers in the envelope enclosed. Yours faithfully, Oliver."

In October, 80 people from Camden went to the Doncaster area to take up food, clothes and money. We met the pickets at Cortonwood and Goldthorpe and had a tremendous reception at Askern. A miner and his wife told me their thirteen year old daughter was actively supporting the strike. She later wrote me a long letter under different headings. This is what she wrote about picketing:

"My dad goes picketing every day. He usually goes to pits in Nottingham in his friend's car (Alan). He goes with Alan and Billy. He shouldn't go picketing now because he has been arrested, but he does. He is to go to court on the 19th December 1984. I go to school each day wondering what is happening to my dad. 'Will he be home tonight when I go home?'

Quite a few times my dad has come home with bruises on his arms and legs (more bruises than what I get in hockey).

My mam has been picketing at our local pit quite a lot when she found out three or four men were going into the pit. Once she went to picket at Calverton and she got arrested. She was found guilty for obstruction and threatening behaviour but was not fined.

The other day when my dad came home and told us what had happened during the day I burst out laughing because of the bus which the working men go to work on. About ten people who got behind the bus said that there was nobody on it and on the back seat they saw cardboard cut-outs of what were supposed to be working men. So somebody on the picket line said (with a policeman next to him): "We'll bring some cardboard cut-outs with us on the picket line tomorrow and if the cops ask us why we've got them there we'll reply, if you can do it, so can we.' I am very glad that my mam and dad are fighting for their future and for mine and the other younger generation." **Joanne.**

Another Yorkshire girl, from Swinton, describes the effects of the strike on her family.

"The miners' strike has affected me in many ways because my dad is a miner and since the strike has been on, my spending money has gone down a lot. I have not been able to go out as much because I have not had enough money and I have not been able to buy any new clothes or any new records.

When I used to go home from school I used to watch the television but now my dad makes me turn it off and tells me that we have got to keep the electricity bills low. That sometimes causes an argument and I blame it on him for being on strike. Really I know that it's not fair because he is only doing what the rest of the miners are doing because he doesn't want to let the miners' union down.

Since the strike has been on my dad has done a lot more work round the house and now he realises how hard it is for my mum to go out to work and then come home and start doing the housework. It is also a big help to my mum to be able to come home and not have to start doing the work, because she is able to relax and does not get tired and then she is in a better mood with my dad and my brother." **Cheryl (age 15).**

In Kent I met a fifteen year old girl called Ellie Bence. Her father is a miner at Snowdown Colliery and her mother spent much of the strike speaking at meetings. Her grandfather was in the General Strike of 1926 and had cycled down to Kent from Scotland in 1931 to find work. Her friend Lisa, also fifteen, said she was on the picket line when both her brother and her father were arrested. They all live in the pit village of Aylesham.

Power and confidence

Ellie has been writing poems about the strike and she told me she was going to read them out in the miners' club during a performance by the Ragged Trousered Cabaret. The cabaret commanded much attention but when Ellie got up to the mike there was complete silence. She dedicated one of the poems to her father and read it with great power and confidence:

A job so dirty and dangerous
Conditions worse than hell
A stench of cold and darkness
Is all a nose can smell
All an ear hears is the Whistling and Banging of work
All the men can feel is tiredness and dirt

ERS' STRIKE

All the eye can see is a black and lonely cave
Their legs and arms so heavy
Their backs and shoulders grazed
And when I ask my father why he is striking
once again
He answers oh so calmly for the Unity of Men.

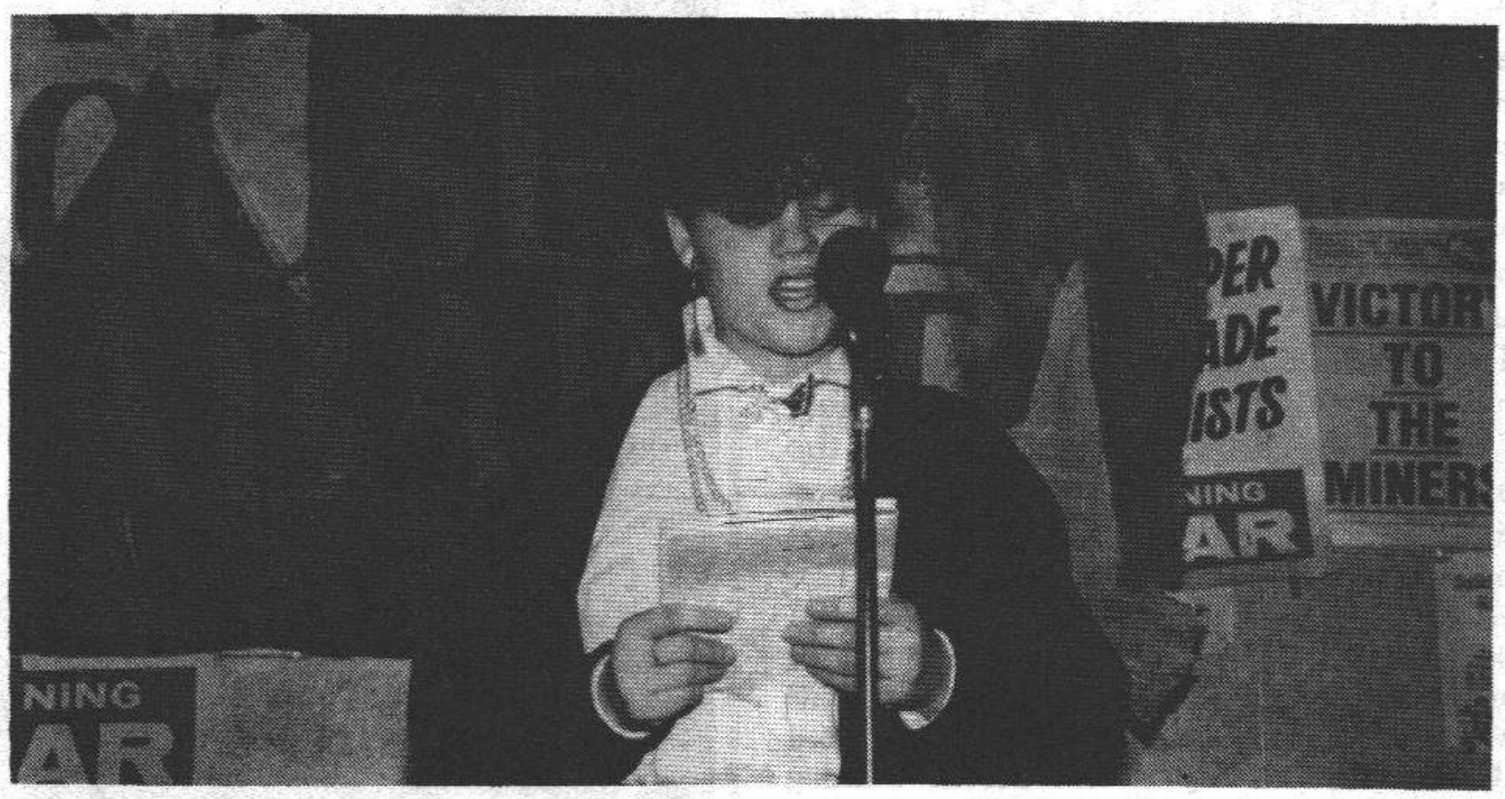
The final poem she sang to the tune of Amazing Grace. People stood to applaud. Her father was in tears. Ellie was overwhelmed.

It's taken time to build our lives
Our strong community
But strength and love will see us through
To keep our unity

For many months we've fought like dogs
And now the pit's a part
Of our lives and history
The centre of my heart

As time goes on and things get hard
I know we will pull through
And years from now our sons will mine
It's all the thanks to you.

Martin Hoyles



Ian Steel

Ellie Bence reading a poem during a performance by the Ragged Trousered Cabaret

We are compiling a book of writings and drawings by striking miners' children, in order to raise money for the mining communities. These could be accounts of children's actions in support of the strike, poems, thoughts and feelings about the strike, drawings, cartoons, songs, jokes. Please send any children's contributions to Martin Hoyles and Susan Hemmings, c/o The Labour Centre, 8 Camden Road, London NW1 9DP.



John Chapman

Twelve police-horses in Whitehall

Twelve police-horses in Whitehall,
Bearing grave men with downcast eyes
Lifted no higher than their horses' ears,
Listening and unlistening, waiting.
The horses meek, in love with obedience.
At the quiet signal by the Cenotaph
Blood draining, eyes up now shining
Canter precisely into women, men and children
Chopping them sideways into parsley swathes,
Cutting and cutting, turning and turning,
Explaining with elegance of hoof and truncheon
The ground-rules of the game of State.
"Bastards!" a woman couldn t stop screaming
At minds groomed beautifully as horses necks,
Within oblivious, structured visored faces.

Denis Knight
(Whitehall. 24th February. 5 p.m.

BEFORE THE HORSES CHARGE, FEBRUARY 24th

No amnesty for Kinnock!

Garth Frankland,
(Leeds City Councillor)

The miners' strike has ended in defeat. The object of the strike was to obtain guarantees over pit closures but instead the NUM has gone back without agreement. It has left over 700 of its most active and militant members outside the gates. The situation is not however that of 1926. The 'orderly' return to work with huge demonstrations, bands and banners flying high, showed that the spirit of the miners has not been broken. That assessment is also made by millions of other workers. The opinion polls show 72% calling for an amnesty and the massive demonstration on 'democracy day' shows that the working class has not been knocked back.

Why did the miners lose? We can knock on the head the right wing's fairy tales of lack of ballot and lack of popularity of the strike. This was the largest and longest and most supported strike in the history of the British working class. Millions of pounds have come to the movement from the rank and file trade unionists, the poor, the women's movement, the gay movement, etc.

This industrial dispute clearly was political from the very beginning. The so-called Ridley plan was the mechanism designed to smash the unions and the NUM in particular. The Tories prepared their ground along the lines of the plan. They developed new laws designed to destroy the effective power of unions. They reorganised the police and the Special Branch so they could be run on a war footing. The Tories had a perspective for total victory because they knew it was not going to be just an industrial dispute. They knew it would not be a re-run of 1974.

The NUM were driven into the dispute when the Tories were ready. The NUM had no option but to fight on this unfavourable ground. Not fighting would have meant the complete destruction of jobs and local communities. But they could not win on their own given the Tory preparation.

The TUC ignored its own resolution on the anti-trade union laws. The TUC refused even to allow the NUM use of its HQ as an emergency centre during the dispute. Instead it opted for pious platitudes while working behind the scenes for a settlement on what ever terms the government would offer.

Neil Kinnock was worse. In his wasted year he lost no time in attacking the miners at critical junctures. In taking up the case of the middle class civil servant Clive Ponting, the weekend that Roy Wright, the Presidnet of Fryston NUM had all the charges of allegedly attacking a scab,dropped, Neil Kinnock showed how far he was out of touch with political reality and the working class. Ponting had sent a few "secrets" to Tam Dalyell over the Belgrano affair. He is a free man who has never been jailed. Roy Wright, one of the most important NUM rank and file leaders in North Yorkshire, was imprisoned for six weeks, and then banished to Southport on £15,000 bail. He was forbidden to speak to *any* NUM member. All charges were dropped. This outrageous use of the courts to silence an important NUM member did not receive a single mention from Kinnock. No wonder he lost the Ponting duel and no wonder the most popular badge among trade unionists in Yorkshire is "No amnesty for Kinnock".

What can be done now? Obviously all the miners' support work must continue while NUM members are in gaol and remain victimised. We should not accept a single miner outside the gates. The fight must be for full reinstatement.



Press Association

Neil Kinnock at last makes it to the miners' picket line. Celynen South Colliery, near Newbridge, 3rd January 1985.

MacGregor has said he intends to lose 25,000 jobs in the pits, bring in tougher managers along with private capital. He has made it clear he intends to keep all the victimised miners out of their jobs. The lessons we have to learn and to fight for is that there must be a political response.

You cannot have a 'Plan for Coal' as long as MacGregor and the entire NCB management structure are in post. MacGregor will stay as long as Thatcher wants him to stay. Those who *did not* fight for a total miners' victory helped the Tories. We must echo the call of the militant Yorkshire miners with their call for "No amnesty for Kinnock" and add "No amnesty for the TUC leaders". We have to build the leadership the miners, the women's movement and the working class have shown they deserved and needed in this magnificent strike.

CONFERENCE :

LESBIANS and GAYS

SUPPORT the MINERS

THE WAY FORWARD

March 30/31st
The London Lesbian and Gay Centre
67/69 Cowcross St. London EC1

ORGANISED BY LESBIANS AGAINST PIT CLOSURES AND LESBIANS AND GAYS SUPPORT THE MINERS

We have broken new ground during the last 12 months. Not only have more lesbians and gay men organised openly as lesbians and gays in support of the miners than have ever previously been involved in a working class struggle, but the response of the mining communities has led to the formation of bonds that should not be broken.

Many lesbians and gays will recognise parallels in our own experience of the government's attempts to portray miners and their families as the enemy within. This weekend will give us an opportunity to draw out the best of our experience so far, and to discuss the way forward.

We invite all lesbians and gay men who support the miners, representatives of trade union bodies, and strikers and their families to attend.

I/We would be interested in attending the conference and require accommodation for
. . . . . .adults and
. . . . . children
NAME . . . . . .
ADDRESS . . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
Number of adults:

Number of children requiring creche accommodation:

Please indicate if you require accommodation in a women-only household

COST: £5.00 waged £1.00 unwaged

PLEASE RETURN THE ABOVE FORM TO: M. JACKSON, 39 LLOYD BAKER ST., KINGS CROSS, LONDON WC1. (phone 01 833 4785)

London LAPC meets every Monday at 6.30pm at the Drill Hall, Chenies St, London WC1, Goodge St tube.

London LGSM meets every Sunday at 6pm in the Fallen Angel, Graham St, N1 Angel tube.

FOR A MASSIVE DEMONSTRATION AT MOLESWORTH

It is vital that the Easter demo at Molesworth is a massive show of strength. Thatcher's Government have already invested £5.5 millions in the eviction of the peace camp and erection of the barbed wire fence. They are organising for a big event. We mustn't let them down. They have already printed identity passes for the local residents' cars and no doubt thousands of police will be drafted in to restrict and intimidate us. A Public Order Act to control 'static' demonstrations is being rushed through Parliament in time for the Easter demonstrations. Our phones are all tapped and the files are bursting. The tabloids are preparing a de-politicised public to accept restrictions on our freedom of movement as normal practice. The subtle use of the word "subversive" in association with "peace activist" is all part of the apparatus of state control in the media. So our response must be the biggest mobilisation of support ever raised in the defence of our civil right to organise, publicise and demonstrate our opposition to the siting of Cruise Missiles at Molesworth and Greenham.



A FOUR DAY DEMONSTRATION

GOOD FRIDAY APRIL 5th

Sponsored marches leave from Stevenage, Leicester and Cambridge. Friday and Saturday details of routes from CND (01-263 0977). Register in advance with CND for overnight accommodation or join the march on the route.

EASTER SUNDAY APRIL 7th

Supporters asked to arrive at Molesworth early evening to light up the base through the night. Bring candles and torches.

EASTER MONDAY APRIL 8th

Massive presence at the base. Ring the base at 2pm with placards and banners and make a row with bells, chimes, tambourines etc and plant pennants (decorated with rainbow ribbons in solidarity with Rainbow Village).

Unlike Greenham we do not have access to the fence along the whole of its 7½ mile perimeter. We are asked to respect the fields of the local farmers and to observe the country code. Demonstrators are advised to bring plenty of warm clothing, flasks and food. Before the Rainbow Village was razed to the ground on the night of February 5th, the MOD land had been planted with wheat and Harvested for the Hungry in Ethiopia. Food and blankets should be taken to Molesworth for a special CND delivery to Ethiopia. They should be taken to the Quaker Peace Caravan opposite the half-built chapel which is now inside the Molesworth fence. The caravan is sited on Church Commission land which, surprise, surprise may be sold to the MOD, despite better offers from Christian CND.

MOLESWORTH NEEDS YOU ALL

Don't put this copy of Briefing in a cupboard. Take it to every meeting and get MASSIVE SUPPORT FOR THE EASTER DEMONSTRATION. Let's show our TOTAL REJECTION OF THATCHER'S WAR DRIVE. We demand US BASES OUT, NO CRUISE AT MOLESWORTH!

Joy Hurcombe
Vice Chair CND
Chair Labour CND
(personal capacity)

A woman's right to choose

WHY should young women in this country be denied the right to control their own bodies?

Ten years ago this month, the Sex Discrimination Act was passed, yet the principles behind this legislation are being violated today as a result of the efforts of Gillick and her supporters.

A woman should be able to choose whether and when to have her children, however those who usually make the choice for us – doctors, the Church and the State – are predominantly male. In this way the injustices of a patriarchal system are inflicted upon us, but young women are not prepared to passively accept these restrictions on our sexuality.

The dangers of this new law have far-reaching consequences. It represents a direct attack on young working class women. Of course fewer will seek contraceptive advice, and so the Gillick ruling will lead to more deaths because of an increase in backstreet abortions. Already two young women have committed suicide – one of them had been sexually abused by her father and so she could not talk to her parents about it – and Mrs Gillick's "compassionate" response was "suicide is nothing new. It's just a very sad example of what happens when children are involved in sexual matters. One way or another, they are going to get hurt".

The Powell Unborn Children (Protection) Bill echoes this attitude and seeks to outlaw abortion and progressive research into contraception and foetal development.

Trotsky said in 1936 that "A woman's right to abortion . . . is one of her most important social, political and cultural rights" and by taking this away it represents a further step on the road to fascism. The Tory government knows all too well that the family forms the foundations of capitalism, and any attempt to strengthen it effectively silences the revolutionary potential of young women which poses such a threat to Thatcher's Victorian values. The Powell Bill, like the White Bill and the Corrie Bill before it, must not be passed: however it is scandalous to note that several Labour MPs actually voted for it on its First Reading in Parliament.

Young women must stand up and fight for their rights. The moves of the so-called "moral majority" must be defeated; we should take positve action to defend the right to control our bodies in the way in which we determine. The issues at stake go much wider than just women's politics – it is an attack on the whole labour movement and as such must be resisted.

Young women call for *your* solidarity in the struggle against women's oppression.

Felicity Spector, Karina Holyoak,
Anna Mackenzie
Birmingham YCND

MAGNIFICENT MINERS!

12 months that shook Britain: the story of the strike; plus Women: the heart of the resistance; Issues and experiences; Lessons for our movement; plus a photo-history of the strike.

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INTERNATIONAL LABOUR BRIEFING

ISRAEL'S IRON FIST POLICY

In the Israeli army there is a small group, Yesh Gvul ('There is a Limit') that refuses to serve in Lebanon. Its name comes by way of a response to those like the former War Minister, Moshe Dayan, who asserted that there were no limits to Zionist expansionism. They are represented by the small left Zionist group Mapam (once Israel's second largest party) and its Kibbutz Federation, Ha'artzi. They supported the 1967 War of Expansion, especially the conquering of the Syrian Golan Heights, but after an initial hesitation wish to see a withdrawal from Lebanon.

The Israeli Labour Party itself supported the initial invasion of Lebanon, indeed the present 'Defense' Minister Yitzhak Rabin supported the entering of Beirut. But then Rabin's adviser when he was Premier was none other than the same Sharon. It is little wonder that it is under Rabin that the Israeli army is engaging in a pacification programme, Operation Iron Fist, that borrows its techniques from similar pacification techniques in Europe during the 2nd World War.

Today Israel's initial strategy in entering Lebanon is in ruins. Its preferred surrogates, the Phalangists, are incapable of attacking the Shi'ite or Druze strongholds, instead they prefer to massacre unarmed Palestinian civilians. True Israel has succeeded in destroying the PLO's military presence in Lebanon – such as it was – but in its place there is a hostile Shi'ite population in Southern Lebanon, a population which had previously been in conflict with the PLO.

Israel's Iron Fist policy does not simply include daily curfews, arbitrary arrests, torture, random executions, the taking of hostages, the bulldozing of suspects homes etc. It involves a strategy of counter-terror learned from Begin's Irgun terrorist group. In the week beginning March 3rd, two bomb explosions in Beirut and the South killed over 100 people and injured hundreds more. They were without doubt planted by Israeli agents. The response was equally swift with a car bomb exploding virtually on the Israeli border. By such methods Israel is hoping to cow the South as a precursor to the establishment of a puppet government in the South or a part of it. But whereas they had their Major Haddad ruling over a narrow strip of territory before the invasion, today the situation is entirely different. Their Southern Lebanon Army has all but collapsed and their agents have fled Sidon. What Israel will settle for is a stirring up of the confessional and sectarian divisions which will make Lebanon impotent. Israel has its eyes on the waters of the Litani and the market that has been created in the South for Israeli goods. Which is why the withdrawal of the Israeli army to newer borders will not, and cannot mean the withdrawal of Israeli interference in Lebanese affairs. The Israeli army still continues to make incursions into the territory it has supposedly withdrawn from. It is inconceivable that Israel would withdraw to the international borders whilst a radical nationalist movement grows.

Instead Israel may try to reach a deal with Syria, the newly enhanced Arab power in the region. Syria will no doubt promise to try and police Lebanon all the more effectively. Israel meanwhile has undoubtedly suffered a political, if not military, defeat although ironically the Palestinians will have gained very little as a result. In Israel itself the national Zionist consensus over the war was broken though when it comes to the Palestinians under Israeli rule, there is a much greater degree of consensus around the objectives if not the means to secure the objective of preserving a 'Jewish' state in which Arabs are at best the under class, the most exploited section of the proletariat.

Tony Greenstein

Crushing victory for left

Two elections were held in West Germany on 10th March. Their results should be brought to the attention of every member of the Labour Party. The West Berlin election saw a Christian Democratic victory over a leader of the SPD right-wing, Hans Apel, the former Defence Minister. This was a defeat in a city that for long had been a bastion of the Social Democrats.

The other election took place in the Saar, an industrial region with 14% unemployment which has not, traditionally, been a Social Democratic region. Here, the leader of the SPD Left-wing, Oscar Lafontaine, won a crushing victory winning a proportion of the vote greater than the SPD has ever won in a national election: 49%.

NEW PROGRAMME

But the crucial significance of Lafontaine's victory lies in the programme he stood on. This was not the usual SPD programme with a left-wing flavouring. It was an entirely new programme: for West Germany to withdraw from NATO's military structure; for the US to withdraw not only its missiles but also its troops from the FRG; and for the nationalisation of the steel industry. Lafontaine's programme is one West German answer to the new Cold War. The other comes from the right-wing of the governing party, the CDU. Both of these new lines indicate that the old, 1970s politics of West Germany – the so-called Ostpolitik of Chancellor Schmidt – has collapsed.

The old Ostpolitik presented West Germany as the vanguard of detente between Washington and Moscow, helping to smooth the path towards wider and deeper understandings



German steelworkers demonstration (DR)

One of the most significant decisions of the London Labour AGM was on Ireland. Below Labour Briefing reprints Sinn Fein's report of the Conference's debate.

AN PHOBLACHT/REPUBLICAN NEWS, Thursday, March 7th, 1985

LONDON LABOUR TO DISCUSS WITHDRAWAL

BY JANE PLUNKETT

THE GREATER LONDON Labour Party is to launch an unprecedented series of discussions and meetings over the coming year on the issue of a British withdrawal from Ireland.

At their annual conference last weekend, delegates decided that the London Labour Party, plus its affiliated trade unions and other organisations, should be asked to discuss Labour MP Tony Benn's parliamentary Private Member's Bill proposing withdrawal.

Delegates instructed the London regional executive to write and circulate their own report, based on these discussions, and also to organise a major public meeting on the issue, with speakers from local constituency Labour Parties, women's sections, trade unions and the GLC.

The successful motion specifies that *"the majority of republican opinion"* should be involved in these discussions and, during last Sunday's debate, speakers made clear that by this they were recognising the right of Sinn Fein, in particular, to put its viewpoint. Sinn Fein will also be invited to attend the conference next year.

SUPPORT

Despite a barrage of media-orchestrated advance denunciations, the motion, which was supported by the regional executive, gained significant trade union support and was narrowly passed on a card vote, with 315,500 for and 292,000 against.

The motion was proposed by Hornsey and Wood Green women's section and seconded on behalf of Hayes and Harlington constituency Labour Party by John McDonald, who is also deputy leader of the GLC.

Earlier in the debate, an alternative motion which called for an *"immediate and unconditional"* British withdrawal from the six counties and support for *"troops out"* campaigns was narrowly defeated by 305,000 votes to 294,000.

Note: *As Tony Benn did not win a place in the Private Members' Ballot, Ernie Roberts has now taken up the Withdrawal Bill. Copies of the Bill available from London Labour Party, 195 Walworth Rd, London SE17.*

in West Germany

between the two super-powers in order to develop closer links between the FRG and Eastern Europe, especially the GDR. This policy collapsed with the arrival of Cruise and Pershing missiles in West Germany and other West European countries. This made the FRG the base for a qualitatively new threat to the USSR in Moscow's eyes and the West German government's refusal to reject the new US missiles led to the collapse of Foreign Minister Genscher's Ostpolitik last year.

The CDU right welcomed the arrival of Pershing and the new Cold War as a way of reverting to the old Adenauer politics of the 1950s: Germany would be re-united by integrating itself with the capitalist West and building up an overwhelming military strength that would force Moscow to give up support for the GDR and Poland or face military catastrophe. Since the CDU's election victory two years ago there has been an uninterrupted stream of speeches from Government ministers and CDU–CSU members of the Bundestag insisting that Germany should eventually regain its 1937 frontiers and seeking to achieve this through a military build-up and an American-German axis in NATO. Chancellor Kohl himself has finally declared, a couple of weeks ago, that his government does not seek the dismemberment of Poland, but he still insists upon the twin themes of strengthening NATO and pulling the GDR –peacefully – into unity with the FRG.

There is, of course, a strong element of purely domestic politics in this new line from the West German right. People from Germany's former Eastern Lands still make up a large minority of the West German electorate and an important minority for CDU–CSU votes; and at the same time, the government wants to counter Left-wing national unity programmes by reviving traditional German nationalism of the right. Nevertheless, this new 'revenchism' is enough to alarm not only Moscow but also such West European governments as the Italians and the British.

LEFT ALTERNATIVE

But the collapse of the Schmidt-Genscher Ostpolitik has also brought forth a new alternative on the Left: for West Germany to continue to develop closer relations with the GDR, Eastern Europe and the USSR, by rejecting the huge US military build-up, by removing nuclear weapons from West Germany and gaining the removal of US troops as well. This policy would also be combined with a more socialist domestic programme to reduce unemployment and maintain the welfare rights of the workers. Lafontaine's dramatic victory in the Saar demonstrated that this policy has a mass electoral appeal.

The fashionable catch-phrase on the right and the left in the West these days is that we must 'overcome the division of Europe', 're-unite Europe' etc. This is, indeed, an historic task for the peoples of the continent. But what makes such phrases glib and superficial is the fact that it leaves out of account the two key issues in any such re-unification: the German question, and the issue of the socio-economic as well as the political character of such a reunited Europe.

The Lafontaine victory is so important because it points the way towards a real resolution of these basic problems: a neutralised and socialist West Germany is the basic precondition for the reunification of both halves of Europe in a way that does not involve the threat of nuclear annihilation, a way that offers the only secure possibility for political freedom for the peoples of Eastern Europe. Few foreign policy tasks are more important for the Labour Left than to establish links with the socialist, neutralist left within the SPD and other Left-wing parties in Western Europe.

Oliver MacDonald

Reporting on South Africa: not the whole truth

Not a week goes by without the establishment press in Britain reporting on South Africa. In the last six months the reports have grown even more frequent. This is to be expected given the relentless militancy of the current struggles in South Africa. But, as usual, what the press reports is not always the whole story nor the truth. Besides, after what we've recently seen of the reporting of the miners' strike in Britain, we know only too well how selective and biased the press is in its coverage. For those of us in Britain involved in solidarity work for the liberation struggle in South Africa and relying on the press for much of our information about South Africa, it is important to bear this in mind when we read press reports on South Africa.

SANZA CHOCHO
(member of Editorial Committee, AZANIA FRONTLINE)

There are groups and personalities engaged in the South African struggle that receive so much media publicity that many people in the solidarity movement are left with the impression that there are no other groups involved in the struggle for liberation. Some of these media-neglected groups inside South Africa have grown accustomed to seeing a photo of themselves and their actions printed in the press but without any accompanying text to report on the group's responsibility for the action. Instead, reports tend to focus publicity on the names of groups which have only the remotest connection with the action.

An example of this kind of reporting was on British television in August last year, during the demonstrations against the elections to the newly reformed racist parliament in South Africa, when pictures of pickets outside polling booths were shown. The pickets carried placards bearing the name "National Forum" but no mention of the National Forum was made in the news broadcast. Some of the photos published in South African English language newspapers showed pickets whose placards were inscribed with the words 'I'll keep my X for a Free Azania". The name "Azania" itself indicates that the pickets at polling booths were members of organisations like Action Youth, Cape Action League and Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), all affiliated to the National Forum. But, other than the photo, pages and pages in a newspaper like "City Press" followed one another reporting the anti-election demonstrations without once mentioning the National Forum or any of its affiliates by name. Further, the groups which received copious mention in the press were those hostile to the use of the name "Azania".

Two months went by after the resounding boycott of the elections before people in South Africa could read that, "A very active member of the National Forum is the Cape Action League which played a major role in the poor percentage polls recorded in the Cape during the recent elections (*The Star*, 18.10.84). In Britain most solidarity workers do not even know of the Cape Action League despite this major role.

KENNEDY'S VISIT

In January this year, Senator Edward Kennedy's visit to South Africa evoked much anti-imperialist protest from the ranks of the liberation movement right inside South Africa. Kennedy was a guest of personalities who are given much publicity by the establishment press in Britain as well as the English language press in South Africa. Thanks to the considerable media fanfare surrounding his visit, the liberation groups which used the occasion to demonstrate against US imperialism and to remind Kennedy of Vietnam, Palestine and the conditions of blacks in the USA, also received considerable attention, albeit distorted, in the press.

Among the groups organising the demonstrations were the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), the Federation of Cape Civic Associations and the Cape Action League. As a result *The Guardian* (22.2.85) carried a long report featured in its Third World review page with the headline "Beyond the Anger of AZAPO". Although the report was full of inaccuracies, it helped bring attention to the complexity of the South African national liberation movement. It showed that besides the organisations so much acclaimed in the press there are others equally popular and well to the left.

BLACK TRADE UNION

Within the emerging independent black trade union movement are ten of the most powerfully organised industrial unions affiliated to the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). In 1982 FOSATU'S Secretary spelt out a two-fold project: the creation of a single federation to unite all the independent trade unions in the short-term, and the creation of an independent political working class organisation in the long term.

FOSATU sees the creation of a working class political organisation as, in the words of its secretary, "necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters". In November last year, a stay-at-home call by the Release Mandela Committee was supported by FOSATU (as also by the other large federation of independent black trade unions, the Council of Unions of South Africa) and thereby leant the weight of the trade union movement to the call and made it the most successful two-day stay-at-home ever.

But at the practical day to day level of politics in South Africa today, no organisation is more active than the Cape Action League in pursuit of the creation of an independent political organisation of the working class. For the CAL is responsible for much more beyond causing low percentage polls in apartheid elections and demonstrating that there is an active section of South Africa's national liberation which will not have truck with those who like Kennedy are presenting an "acceptable" face of imperialism. According to CAL's media officer, Armien Abrahams, "The exis-



REVIEW OF 'IMPROPER CONDUCT'
HOMOPHOBIA AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

A very few people will have actually seen this movie, it appeared at the NFT last year and for two weeks at the ICA in January. However its subject (Cuba and especially Cuban treatment of Lesbians and Gays) has received widespread publicity in the Gay and 'trendy' media. It has also provoked an incredible defensive reaction from the Cuban Government itself with publication in the weekly 'Granma' of an article by Cuban film maker Tomas Gutierrez, which denies the charge of anti-Gay repression and instead charges the maker of 'Improper Conduct', Nestor Almendros, with being part of the US anti-Cuban propaganda campaign.

There is no question of Lesbians and Gays not suffering repression in Cuba, even the Cuban Government doesn't deny that. In the 60s Lesbians and Gays were sent to special camps for 're-education'. The film *doesn't* say that those camps were closed down in 1967 (and by exception implies they are still open). Gays and Lesbians are openly excluded from certain occupations, particularly those that involve contact with young people.'*It was resolved that all manifestations of Homosexual deviations are to be firmly rejected and prevented from spreading.*' (1st National Congress on education and culture 1971) There are, to date, no open Lesbians and Gays in any responsible positions in Cuba, in fact, they are specifically excluded from the CP. There are numerous laws aimed at controlling public behaviour, which, of course, are an excuse for homophobic officials and individuals to harass Gays and Lesbians. In 1980 the issue of Cuban homophobia rose to the surface with the mass exodus of people from Mariel to Miami, denounced by Fidel as: '*degenerates, drug addicts, criminals and homosexuals.*' And now we have the 'Granma' article which says: '*In the middle of a battle you can't discuss aesthetics, homosexuality or anything.*' What, not even machismo, health, mental illness, or countless other 'diverting' subjects that the Cuban CP has 'chosen' to discuss? The effect of *this* attitude to homosexuality' or to be more precise, discussion on sexual liberation, is intense repression of Lesbian and Gay sexualities.

ROOT OF OPPRESSION

Propaganda *against* machismo *and* public immorality and *for* the family is counterproductive. The oppression of women , including lesbians, and of gay men, is rooted in the family institution. However you can't just abolish the family (Trotsky said that you have to replace it). As I'll come onto later, there is genuine hope that that development is happening in Cuba.

Gutierrez is right – you have to place Cuban homophobia in context (try comparing Cuban experience with ours in Britain for a start!). An overthrow of the Cuban regime by US imperialism (and supported by those who made the movie) would be a backward step for Cuban Lesbians and Gays, all Cubans in fact.

Despite the movie's claims there is no other Latin American state – bar, perhaps, Nicaragua – where we face better conditions. We should pause to consider the massive involvement of Cuban workers in their own lives, through democratic structures, and the massive improvement in their lives through such things as free health care and cheap housing for all, before we criticize.

Cuba isn't China or Russia. It campaigns against machismo not for it. It arms the people not suppresses them. It condemns bureaucracy not upholds it. Within this context, lies future hope for Lesbians and Gays in Cuba.

LATIN AMERICAN MACHISMO

One particular reason for Cuban homophobia is a local one, Latin American Machismo. Deeply embedded in all Latin American countries and tied to Catholicism, its male supremist ideology isn't going to disappear in 25 years. (It finds a particular form in the repression of 'passive' Gays *not* 'active' ones – not as in the West, regarded as Gay – similar to attitudes in Arab countries and the West before the Industrial Revolution.) Machismo is being most effectively fought by women coming together in their own organisations in Cuba and by Government campaigns against Machismo and for 'shared family responsibilities' as codified in the law 'the family code'.

Another aspect of homophobia peculiar to Cuba came from the 'prostitutionalisation' of Havana, pre-1959. Havana was the equivalent of Bangkok or Hong Kong now, with poor Cuban youths selling their bodies to US tourists and servicemen. Gay prostitutes (as today in the Third World) 'feminised' themselves and wore drag and make-up.

BY–PRODUCT OF IMPERIALISM

This led to the view of Castro and the other Nationalists that Homosexuality was a by-product of Imperialist domination that was totally antagonistic to national independence and Socialism. This attitude is reflected in Cuban coverage of Lesbians and Gays, see its coverage of the New York Gay scene for example. That Cuba *is* writing about the New York Gays can only be seen as progressive. Alongside the Granma article it points to change over the next 25 years.

The best way we can aid this development is not by lining up with Reagan and Almendros, but by starting from a position of defending the gains of the Cuban Revolution. We should support this position, which is the position of the Mexican Lesbian and Gay Movement:-

'*We socialist, anti-sexist, Lesbians and Gay men, should not lend ourselves to the anti-social manipulations produced by Capitalist Imperialism. On the contrary, at the same time that we denounce homophobia and other sexist vestiges of the Cuban Government, we firmly defend and support the Cuban people in its revolutionary process.*'

Paul Canning
Lesbian and Gay Young Socialists

'Improper Conduct' — an anti-Cuba smear

BY HARRY RING

***Improper Conduct*. Directed by Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez-Leal. Produced in France. In Spanish and French, with English subtitles.**

Improper Conduct is a counterrevolutionary propaganda tract which purports to be a documentary. It is marked by half-truths, gross exaggerations, and bald-faced lies.

Designed to promote the imperialist war drive against Cuba, it's aimed primarily at those who may have some sympathy for the Cuban revolution, but whose sympathy is tenuous enough to be shaken by a good horror story.

The codirectors are Cuban exiles and virulent enemies of the revolution.

So are the two dozen Cuban exiles who offer "testimony" in the film.

The title derives from an assertion that

IN REVIEW

Cubans arrested on the street who could not be classified as either homosexuals or "hippies" were charged with "improper conduct."

To provide a "theoretical" underpinning for the film's anticommunist message, an additional, non-Cuban "witness" is included. This is Susan Sontag, the U.S. literary figure who, a few years ago, turned from left-wing beliefs to militant anticom-

Other participants in this "documentary" tell equally ludicrous stories without so much as raising a questioning eyebrow from their interviewer.

Juan Goytisolo, a Spanish writer who visited Cuba in the late 1960s, says he learned that 60,000 gays had been jailed. (Proportionate to population that would be equivalent to 1.5 million in the United States.)

The proof for this astonishing figure? Unasked and unstated.

Exile writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante voices the view that the treatment of homosexuals in Cuba is comparable to the extermination of the Jews at Auschwitz or the Spanish Inquisition.

The wildness of the charges is matched only by the light-mindedness of the explanations.

One glaring example of this is provided by the testimony of Heberto Padilla, the poet who emigrated here in 1979. In 1971 Cuban authorities detained Padilla briefly and, in this writer's opinion, unjustly.

The Cuban leadership, Padilla blandly says in the film, "cannot tolerate homosexual men. But the lesbians excite them. Nothing excites the primitive Cuban mind like two women in bed."

Film critics seemed particularly taken with one really heavy horror story.

An ex-prisoner tells the story of "Roberto" (no last name), who he says was in an adjoining cell.

"Robertico," he says, was jailed at age



***Improper Conduct* includes many preposterous stories. One such is told by Martha Frayde, shown here with Fidel Castro. An ex-delegate to UNESCO, Frayde broke with revolution in its first years. In 1979, she was convicted of trying to leave country illegally. In prison, she says in *Improper Conduct*, she saw "dark-skinned" women return from month in solitary and "their skin was white."**

But he was not jailed for being a Batista cop. Nor for his dissident views. In 1960, he and 16 others were charged with planting bombs in public places. In the house where they were arrested, police found explosives and weapons. They were convicted in a widely reported trial and sentenced to 30 years. Later it was reduced to

imperialist domination. It is the heritage of prerevolutionary Havana, where, for example, those driven into prostitution, male and female alike, were shamefully degraded and exploited.

Antigay prejudice does survive in Cuba. There is remaining discrimination and

tence of a group like the Cape Action League has stimulated a lot of discussion around, for example, working class leadership. One of the spin offs from all the free discussion – which some people have problems with, not because of the nature of the discussions but the fact that they are held in the first place – is that the issues have fed into other organisations and forums. There are factions, for example, in the Cape United Democratic Front, which hold positions identical to ours. One of CAL's practical contributions to struggle has been this theoretical input which has filtered through to other organisations. We have challenged all the cliches of the liberation movement, and people have been compelled to reconsider these (things) whether we were right or wrong. We have only been able to do this because we are committed to mass struggle. CAL is not a group of intellectuals sitting around, but activists engaged in mass struggle. To that extent people have been compelled to take note and to answer, whether they have been in alliance with us or not. That has been a major contribution."

In raising questions at the same time as being actively involved in mass struggle, CAL is no different to *London Labour Briefing* or other sections of the Labour Party left which get no credit in the establishment media (nor from the Labour Party leadership) for all the hard work they put into support of the Labour Party, miners on strike, etc but receive only abuse for being left-wing, "trot", or whatever!

science briefing

The fight for coal goes on

The miners' strike is over but the fight goes on against pit closures and for a socalist energy policy which will ensure coal consumption expands and nuclear power is phased out.

Unless the Labour and Trade Union movement and the ongoing miners' support network vigorously takes up the fight for more coal consumption at every level, opposition to pit closures will just reduce to opportunist windbagism.

The truth about coal and Britain's Energy future was successfully and effectively raised at a number of levels by some groupings especially in the latter half of the strike. However with a few notable exceptions, Labour MPs, CND, and the 'Green movement' were utterly pathetic in their blinkered failure to put forward the crucial equations: Nuclear Power = Plutonium for bombs plus deadly and almost everlasting waste. Coal Power is cheaper, safer and can easily be cleaned; and pits must be worked to exhaustion otherwise billions of tons of coal will be 'sterilized' – locked irretrievably underground.

EZRA SPEAKS OUT

In the strike the Government's 'economic argument' was exposed as a lie and even Derek Ezra former NCB Chief wrote in the Observer in the twelfth month of the strike that British coal is of higher quality than the imported scabby muck. He explained that with the falling pound and generally rising oil prices the expected market for coal is about the same as pre-strike level and should grow in the longer term! Indeed the new sellability of coal from the NE has been privately admitted to the NUM by NCB sales chiefs.

DISTRICT HEATING PROGRAMMES

The introduction of District Heating Programmes whereby waste heat from coal fired stations is used in localities – an impossibility for Nukes – would further improve the viability of coal. Expansion of coal consumption by replacing oil and gas for domestic heating through Local Authority programmes would again greatly enhance coal markets and increase demand for low sulphur coal from Wales and Scotland.

NOW it is vital for the Campaign to be expanded at street level, in Local Authorities and in Parliament. A future Labour Government must:–

**HALT THE NUCLEAR POWER PROGRAMME AND PHASE OUT ALL NUCLEAR STATIONS.*

**EXPAND COAL PRODUCTION AND HAVE A POLICY TO WORK PITS TO EXHAUSTION.*

**INTRODUCE DISTRICT HEATING PROGRAMMES IN CONJUNCTION WITH COUNCILS.*

**REPLACE DOMESTIC GAS AND OIL BURNING WITH LOW SULPHUR AND SMOKELESS COAL BURNING AS FAR AS POSSIBLE.*

It is now important to pass resolutions on these lines and get discussion going in your localities and councils.

Piers Corbyn,
Bermondsey CLP and Energy Policy Workshop of Mineworkers Defence Committee

THE FREEZE UP

Last *Science Briefing* forecast the very cold spell which began on February 9 may be prolonged and was part of a cycle of cold winters comparable with 1683/4 when the Thames froze over . . . we were right. It lasted 12 days and the Thames froze over at Battersea. Although it seems the Lords spiritual were on the miners' side the would-be Lords temporal were not.

SPEAKERS, INFORMATION AND MODEL RESOLUTIONS

Energy Policy Workshop of Mineworkers Defence Committee, c/o 55 Innis House, East Street, London SE17 2JN. Tel. 701 5691.

Dear Comrade,

We in the South of England have often been criticised for a lack of activity in promoting a socialist alternative. Mid-Sussex constituency Labour Party has therefore decided to take a positive attitude to the promotion of socialist ideas; to this end we are organising a festival and rally in Haywards Heath on Saturday July 13th.

The event, called the "SOUTHERN ALTERNATIVE" is being staged in conjunction with ARTS FOR LABOUR. The aims are to use the arts to show there is an alternative to the southern tory way of life, and to be part of a major recruitment campaign in the South.

We have chosen Haywards Heath as the venue for several reasons:

1. We believe that a positive attitude to campaigning must be taken and to do that we must operate in the opposition's backyard as opposed to our own.
2. The media coverage will be far higher for an event staged outside the accepted Labour areas. (We have demonstrated this already in connection with collections for the miners).
3. The value and credibility gained by the party both locally and nationally by the promotion of a professionally organised alternative event will be immense, and if correctly used will lead to greatly increased membership.
4. Haywards Heath has easy access as it is on the main London/Brighton rail service, and the venue is only 5 mins from the rail station. We have also arranged the programme so that travellers from London can catch the last train home.
5. There is a wonderfully positioned open park in the centre of the town for the rally.

The festival and rally, which we have called the "SOUTHERN ALTERNATIVE" is intended to be the first of an annual event. You will see from the information enclosed



that as well as holding a major evening concert there will be workshops/seminars throughout the day. There will also be a theatre group, 7:84 or similar, to be decided in conjunction with Arts for Labour. We are also arranging various stalls, and we will also have clowns and various street groups around all day.

The event is not designed as a purely fund raising affair, neither do we see it as totally subsidised political education, rather instead a mixture of the two. Whilst sponsorship is required for this event, and we welcome sponsors from every section of the labour movement, we see the event developing into a significant educational/cultural annual affair which will eventually become self funding.

If you or your organisation is interested in sponsoring the event there are several ways this could be done.

1. Sponsor a brick in the ALTERNATIVE WALL.
2. A greetings or direct advertisement in the programme.
3. The hire of one of the stalls to promote your organisation.
4. Sponsorship of a specific workshop or artiste.

Further details can be obtained from Graham Lee on Haywards Heath 413086 or by writing to this address: Graham Lee, 97 Franklands Village, Haywards Heath, West Sussex.

If you or your organisation would like to see something particular put on during the day we would like to hear from you.

We should like to point out that we do not see the festival/rally as an event in isolation, we envisage it as the main point in a Southern membership recruitment drive and political promotion programme.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours fraternally,

Graham Lee.

Published by Labour Briefing, 162 Millfields Road, London E5.

Next national editorial on Sunday 21st April at 1pm at Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham.

Printed by Wernham Printers Ltd [TU], Forster Road, London N17.