LONDON LABOUR 10p

BRIEFING

No 6 OCTOBER 1980

Local Government Crisis:

THE CRUNCH HAS COME

ONE OF THE FEW resolutions at Annual Conference which actually committed the Labour Party to a struggle against the Tory government NOW, was the emergency motion from Lambeth calling on the movement to unite and confront Heseltine's local authority cuts. Supported on the NEC by a majority of just one vote, the motion received overwhelming approval and Hattersley and the right wing were left red-faced as their pleas of "leave it to the election" and "respect the law" were booed and barracked by Conference.

The reaction of Conference is indeed indicative of the fact that the whole movement is now looking towards Lambeth Labour Group's "unofficial" Resist Heseltine Conference as the beginning of a real fighback against the Tory cuts. It is becoming clear to wide sections of the movement that we have now reached a crunch situation where we either sink or swim. The defensive option of buying time through rate rises is no longer a way out, the choice is quite clear: fight the government or implement massive cuts.

Lambeth's strategy of seeking to fuse the political and industrial wings of the movement by uniting Labour councils with public sector unions in a common struggle is absolutely correct. Political gestures by isolated Labour Groups are quite useless in the face of this vicious government. Only political action backed by concerted industrial muscle, plus the mobilisation of entire working class communities can confront and turn back Thatcher's onslaught.

However, the real problem facing the Lambeth Conference is not just how we achieve unity, but how we translate any agreement into effective, practical action, i.e. into actual confrontation. Firstly there must be a commitment from Lambeth and other Labour Groups that they *will not implement cuts under any circumstances.* From local authority unions there must be an equally firm commitment that they will launch all-out industrial action in defence of Labour Groups victimised by the Tories. A timetable must be drawn up which anticipates the Tory government's likely reactions. A committee must be elected which monitors developments and is empowered to make calls to action.

Secondly, the TUC and the NEC of the Party must be put on the spot and forced to carry out the Conference decision. Partial strikes against the Tories may not be enough. If we want to win we must be prepared for the possibility of a general strike, if necessary, and the removal of the Thatcher government.

Thirdly we must face up to the problem of penalties and surcharge. Two million workers have already been "surcharged" on to the dole by the Tories. If we seriously want to challenge the government we must expect them to hit back hard. It is not a problem for individual councillors alone, but for the whole Labour movement. *CLPs must draw up lists of those prepared to replace councillors who have been removed.* Unions must pledge financial assistance to those under threat. No repeat of Clay Cross—"an injury to one is an injury to all".

Confrontation with Heseltine means an all-out class war. If we seriously want to transform words into action, we must address outselves to these issues.

FRANK HANSEN
Brent East CLP

CONFERENCE EMERGENCY RESOLUTION

Conference condemns the latest Tory government cuts in local authority expenditure announced by Heseltine on 18th September.

By cutting £200 million from the Rate Support Grant increase order this year, and by inflicting special penalties on those councils which have not cut budgets in line with government policy, the Tories have launched a major attack on working class living standards and the social wage.

The Tory message is clear. Local government services will be destroyed and thousands of local authority workers will join the dole queues.

The options before the Labour Movement are closing rapidly. Rate increases alone will not save services or jobs.

Conference instructs the National Executive Committee to coordinate a united fight of Labour councils and trades unions on a firm no cuts position with the demand for a massive increase in government grant for local authorities.

Delay will see the destruction of social programmes which have taken decades to build up.

In such a confrontation, the Labour Movement must be prepared to use its full strength, including industrial action, to defend the most needy in our society and the interests of every working class family.

Campaigns must be launched to unite local communities behind the action of Labour Councils and trade unionists.

EDUCATION BRIEFING

ILEA Budget - Cuts Next Year?

KEN LIVINGSTONE
GLC Councillor Hackney North

THE ILEA LABOUR GROUP has had its first meeting to decide the basis of next year's education budget. The options before it are to make a cut of £21 million in line with falling rolls or to preserve the present levels of staffing, and finally to decide which items in the manifesto should be introduced from the start of the financial year in April 1981 rather than wait until the election.

In October last year the Labour controlled ILEA started the search for cuts in line with Tory government policy. By December a total cuts package of £21 million (4.2%) had been agreed and the Labour Party was in uproar.

The justification behind the cuts was that if the ILEA played ball then it would be spared by the Tory government.

The massive campaign by CLPs, trades unions, the Labour Party Regional Executive and parents was ignored but even before the cuts had started to bite the Tories launched their plan to disband the ILEA. So much for "playing ball"!

DECISION AHEAD

The cabinet will shortly decide whether to go ahead with the break-up or to back down in the face of the highly successful campaign which parents and teachers have organised across London. But the ILEA must decide within the next eight weeks on its budget for 1981-82 and once again there is pressure from government for cuts.

For the following reasons, however, the ILEA leadership find themselves in a very much weaker position this year:

- Last year's cuts were only carried on the casting vote of the committee chair and since then by-elections have shifted the political colour of the ILEA to the left by a crucial four votes. Thus a new package of cuts can only be passed if the Tories support the ILEA leadership.

- The GLC selections have produced a massive shift to the left in the ILEA area and the in-coming Labour Group, in the words of the draft manifesto, "recognise that the 4.2% cuts forced on the last administration were wrong and we are committed to reversing them." There are further commitments to cut the price of school meals from 35p to 25p, improve the pupil-teacher ratio and expand the provision of services in many areas.

- **In the run up to next May's GLC election the ILEA cannot be seen to be following policies in contradiction to those on which the Party will be fighting the election.**

To balance these factors the pressure from central government for cuts will be even greater. The new Local Government Act will be used to cut London's share of government grant and face councils with the prospect of massive rate increases in order to defend services. Last year Sir Ashley Brainall, Leader of the ILEA, came under pressure from the leaders of the Labour boroughs to cut ILEA spending so that they could keep rate increases under 50%. This year Sir Ashley is insisting that the Labour leaders make any similar demand publicly as he is not prepared to take all the criticism for a cuts policy without their public support.

SUPPORT DEMANDS

We must begin immediately to organise around the following demands:

* No cuts in the budget

* Retain the present level of staffing and use falling rolls to improve the pupil-teacher ratio.

* Restore last year's cuts—still possible.

* Cut the price of school meals from 35p to 25p.

Make sure your organisation sends a motion to the ILEA Labour Group along these lines and lobby your ILEA member or candidate for support for these demands.

If we act now we can prevent a repeat of last year's demaging row and improve the education service in Inner London in the run-up to this vital election.

School Closure Threat

PETER CHALK
Haringey NUT

FOR YEARS THE National Union of Teachers has been campaigning for smaller class sizes and more resources for schools, especially in inner city areas.

Often 'progressive' Labour councils like Haringey have supported this policy and made steps in this direction.

But the cuts are biting deep and the council, with the right now firmly in control, has withdrawn its 'goodwill' towards education in the borough.

A White Paper, published with the apparent full blessing of the Education Committee, proposes the closure of up to *six* of the 14 secondary schools.

This is nothing short of a disaster for children currently going through, and due to go through, these schools. The disruption and uncertainty, the packing of more children into already overcrowded schools (where class sizes of 30 or more are still quite common) and the continued axing of teaching posts will all seriously hamper their chances of a decent education.

None of this is mentioned in the White Paper, which merely talks of the 'problem' of falling rolls and the consequent lowering of intake into the schools: a 'problem' they admit will only last for a few years anyway and, at the lowest point, would mean teaching groups of 15 instead of 30.

Their argument that fewer pupils means less choice of subject options only applies if teaching posts are cut.

The White Paper refuses to even contemplate any more than marginal improvements in pupil-teacher ratio or class sizes.

NUT OPPOSING CLOSURES

The response of the NUT, with nearly 2,000 members, by far the largest teachers' union in the borough, is uncompromising. At last the opportunity exists to teach smaller groups, improve relationships between teachers and pupils and raise the overall standard of education. Moves could be made to open up the schools to wider use by the community, as opportunities arise for the development of alternative education that places the needs of working people and their children before those of capital.

Continued next page

The Heseltine Axe:

BOROUGH BRIEFING

WITH THE announcement of the expected Heseltine penalty clauses, it was no surprise to see that the majority of the boroughs penalised were Labour controlled. They even included Islington, who tried to be such good fellows before the Tory government was elected.

In the true tradition of Islington Council since 1978, as soon as the Heseltine clauses were announced, there was *no* call to defend the living standards of the people of Islington, no *political* unity with the comrades from other boroughs, not even consultation with the other partnership boroughs like Hackney. Not even sympathy to our neighbours Camden.

Islington's response was to do exactly what Heseltine wanted: ask for a waiver, and weaken the united strength of the London Labour Movement. Not really surprising though,as that is exactly what it's been doing for the last two years.

ISLINGTON WAVES WHITE FLAG

We have not forgotten that it was the first London borough to *sell council houses,* advertised in the *Sunday Times.*

Islington's argument to the DOE is

* it presented two sets of figures and the DOE only acted on the figures less favourable to the cuts than Islington has made;
* that partnership should be excluded as Finsberg, Housing Minister, has encouraged partnership boroughs to spend their full partnership allocation:
* that they can reach £1.65 million reduction in expenditure, mainly by not filling vacancies and through delays in opening projects for the physically and mentally handicapped

Heseltine is unlikely to agree that partnership be excluded because that would be helping boroughs like Hackney and Lambeth who have not cowtowed to him, but likely to grant Islington a waiver on the £1.65 million savings they are prepared to make. If Islington is granted a waiver, where does this leave boroughs like Camden who have a £9 million overspend on their HIP allocation? Or partnership boroughs like Hackney and Lambeth?

It can only seriously weaken their position. It's time now for the London Labour Movement to take a stand against Islington, remembering that there are 22 of the 50-strong Labour Group opposed and that the Local Government Committee and a majority of the constituency parties are in opposition too.

VALERIE VENESS
Islington Councillor

NEWHAM

The Labour Group made 5% cuts last year and will almost certainly toe Heseltine's line again. They are relieved not to have been singled out for Heseltine's penalties, but annoyed that they are being punished along with others who have been "well-behaved". As yet they have not had the opportunity of nominating delegates to the conference on November 1. There is no unified response of the left, although some members are thinking through the consequences of a resignation strategy.

HACKNEY

The left in Hackney are projecting a possible resignation strategy when the principle of not making cuts cannot be maintained by rate rises. The Labour Group's majority of 58-2 puts it in a unique resignation position in which the Tories could not take control in the run-up to the re-election campaign, with other elements being an anti-cuts campaign and possible mass local industrial action. The Group leadership are temporarily pinning their hopes on the collective court action against Heseltine and in the long term see the need for united action—as shown by the fact that the Leader and Deputy Leader are to attend the National Conference called by Lambeth.

WALTHAM FOREST

The Group had the foresight drastically to raise the level of its contingency fund last year while maintaining a nil growth policy. Heseltine's penalties can be initially covered by this fund, followed by a second year of nil growth and a large rate rise. For the time when rate rises will no longer be an option the Group is not yet clear on its views, and as yet has not had the chance to nominate delegates to the conference on November 1.

HARINGEY

The axe missed! That was the relieved response of Haringey's leadership after hearing that Haringey had escaped the axe that fell on 14 Labour authorities. With the anomaly of Islington, the "escapers" have all made cuts and basically restricted their opposition to Toryism to strong words in private Labour Group meetings, while making public proclamations of realism for the benefit of the media. . . and Heseltine?

Haringey has in the past been a successful provider of services, and its working people stand to lose very seriously unless the Labour Movement can defend them. The Haringey Campaign against the Cuts has 91 affiliated organisations, and the fighting position of three Labour Parties is not in doubt. What is in serious doubt is the will of Labour councillors to defend the manifesto on which they were elected in 1978.

CAMDEN

Camden will lose the maximum possible of £5.2 million and due to high interest rates and inflation is already heading for a further deficit of £4 million. In addition the council has overspent its Housing Investment Programme budget from the government by between £9 and £12 million.

The Labour Group'has decided to take no decision until after the Lambeth Local Government in Crisis conference on 1st November. But unless a firm common line emerges from that meeting the Labour Group will undoubtably go for a supplementary rate increase.

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After Victory at Party Conference:

No Retreat

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1980 was a great victory for the grass roots of the Labour Movement. The struggle for democracy waged at this historic Conference was no mere, narrow, constitutional wrangle. What was at issue was a challenge to the unfettered autonomy of the parliamentary leadership—a challenge to its right to ignore and reverse Conference decisions. What was at issue was a struggle for POWER within the Labour Party.

RUNNING SCARED

That is why big business and its press are so afraid. We won on mandatory reselection of MPs. We won on widening the franchise for electing the leader. And now the press are running scared of the vision of a Labour government led by Tony Benn, accountable to Conference, and prepared to *implement* a radical socialist programme. As the *Sunday Telegraph* editorial put it: "If the tide which swamped the Winter Gardens... continues to flow, Labour will become in practice, as well as in theory, a thoroughly revolutionary party dedicated to the total transformation of the British state, and of its relationship with the outside world."

Our task in the London Labour Movement is to make sure that tide *does* continue to flow. We've now got everything to fight for. At Blackpool, the Labour left took a first step to transcending its previous parliamentary orientation, and Benn, in particular, openly appealed for mobilisation of mass forces outside Parliament in support of a socialist programme. We must take him at his word. The chance now exists to build constituency parties, attracting radical forces—such as in the women's movement—previously hostile to working in the Labour Party. Above all, that radicalisation generated at Blackpool must be carried into the trade unions where the struggle—both against the Tory government and within the Labour Party—will be won or lost.

BREATHING SPACE

But all is not yet won. The right wing have a three-month breathing space before the special conference to re-group their forces. They will try to ensure that the franchise for the electoral college is kept as narrow as possible. Already Alex Kitson, next chairman of the Party, has made concessions to them. He has indicated that the Parliamentary Party should have greater representation in the electoral college than was proposed at Blackpool.

Concessions along these lines must be resisted. We won at Blackpool. We must be sure that victory is not squandered.

GRAHAM BASH
Ilford South CLP

CLPD's Formula

January 24th 1981 is the date when, building on this year's victory at Blackpool, the special Labour Party Conference can agree an electoral college which makes the leader of the Labour Party accountable to all sections of the Movement.

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy is urging the special conference to back an electoral college in which the votes would be weighted as follows:

Trades Unions—38%
Constituency Parties—30%
Parliamentarians—30%
(i.e. MPs and prospective parliamentary candidates)
Socialist Societies—2%

ANNUAL ELECTION

The CLPD proposed college includes clauses to ensure the annual election of the leader and the recording of each delegation's vote.

The support of hundreds of CLPs is required to ensure the success of this proposal against others which would still allow the PLP to have a dominating vote. For details of the proposed formal constitutional amendments, please contact: CLPD, 10 Park Drive, London NW11 (tel: 458 1505).

NEIL NERVA
Executive Member of CLPD

LETTER

Dear Comrades,

I was amused by your comment about my "new-found" militancy. Clearly your research must be very limited, and your contacts in Hackney Central Labour Party even more limited—if you are unaware of my political position going back many years—some 22, in fact—long before **London Labour Briefing** was ever heard of.

ELLIS HILLMAN
GLC Member for Hackney Central

LATEST GLC SELECTIONS

Brent East, Norman Howard
Croydon North West, Mary Walker
Harrow Central, Alf Elderton
Acton, Jenny Fletcher
Croydon Central, John Evers
Harrow East, John Bartlett
Croydon North East, Peter Spalding
Finchley, Tom McKendry
Carshalton, John Weir
Hornsey, Kate Hoey
Hackney North, Gerry Ross

NEXT MEETING of Briefing Editorial Collective: 6.30pm on October 24th at Ken Livingstone's room at County Hall. Last date for receipt of copy for next issue is November 10th.

Demonstration:
Saturday November 15th

* **End Partition!**
* **For Irish Unity!**
* **For British Withdrawal from Ireland!**

Assemble at Embankment, 1pm
Called by Committee for Withdrawal From Ireland.

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