CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING

LABOUR COUNCILLORS SIDE WITH TORY DISTRICT AUDITOR AGAINST COUNCIL

On Monday 2 March, the "back-bench group of councillors" lead by Ken Hulme, met the Tory Government appointed District Auditor . Present in that sordid meeting were councillors Hulme, Kutapan, Saunders, Smyth, Gill, Kane, Griffiths, Latham, Shaw, Denny and Cousins . Also present - giving a bit of friendly advice - was Nixon, the Chief Executive . The Treasurer Marlowe also decided to pop in for a chat .

For those who are not aware of the clearly political role of the District Auditor, they should examine his actions in disqualifying the Clay Cross, Lambeth and Liverpool Councillors . They should also look at his intervention against the attempt at a local settlement of the NUPE dispute in 1978, and at his issuing of warnings to councils refusing to set a rate in protest at the Government in 1985 . For those who are not yet convinced of his role as an agent of the Tory establishment against Labour Councils, the fact that the Government has appointed a personal assistant for 10 years to Nigel Lawson as the Chair of the Audit Commission should really dispel any remaining doubts .

Unfortunately, those like Hulme, Latham and Denny who clearly understand his role, chose to deliberately invite him in order to undermine the proposed 87/88 budget which was democratically agreed by the party at the Borough Conference. The questioning of the Auditor by most of these councillors suggest that they wanted him to declare it illegal . He declined to do so, but stated that he would rely on the judment of the Chief Executive and the Treasurer to alert him if they thought that it was the case ! When asked to declare that a budget without rent rises was also illegal, he clearly stated that this was not the case ! Obviously, the Auditor is to the left of some labour councillors in that meeting.

Labour Party branches in Camden should ask their councillor , especially if s/he present, to dissociate themselves from this meeting . Branches should also pass resolutions condemning the "back-bench group of councillors" and requesting disciplinary measures be taken by the Labour Group against its officers .

Fred Leplat (Somers Town)

POLICE CONSULTATIVE GROUP THE LABOUR GROUPS CONTRADICTS ITSELF, AGAIN !

The political bankruptcy of the Labour Group's leadership became more apparent than ever, when at its February meeting, it voted 21-17 to continue participating in the PCG (Police Consultative Group). This was despite the fact that over a 100 Camden based groups have opposed it for being unaccountable and a cosmetic front for the police. The Labour Group is also going against the Party as the Borough Conference, the LGC and the Ham & High GMC have opposed participation .

The Group also decided to drop disciplinary action against Judy Watson (Head of the Women's Unit) and Jo Fawkes (Chair of Camden Nalgo) for organising and taking part in the 22nd Jan. picket of the PCG . The Group realised that if it did not withdraw the discplinary actions, it would spark off a major dispute, isolating the council from the unions, the self-orgainsed groups and a good part of the local Party . The Chief Executive did not immediately withdraw the disciplinaries claiming that he was not accountable to the Labour Group ! He eventually withdrew them 3 days later, minutes before industrial action was due to start .

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NEXT CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING MEETING :
Monday 16 March, 8pm, Basement Study Room, Town Hall .

Having lost two "compromise" motions - one on the PCG and the other on the disciplinaries -, the leadership has sacrificed its credibility and control of the Group . Meanwhile, we are waiting for the Party to take some kind of action against councillors Hulme and Latham who were seen assaulting women on the 22nd Jan picket . That these two councillors should initiate disciplinaries rather than argue the matter poltically through the Party is indicative of how the right wing operates . Hulme also brought a Tory member of the Camden Ratepayers to make a statement that he did assault women, but was assaulted himself .

So the leadership is now reaping the whirlwind of its own political opportunism , and in doing so is alienating trade unions and community organisations . The only argument that the Labour Group has for continued participation in the PCG is that it is in the mani festo . But since it has now been overturned by Borough Conference, there is no reason to continue using the manifesto as a fetish . What the leadership refuses to recognise is the need to campaign amongst that part of the community that might still support the PCG, such as TAs, to convince them that non-participation is correct .

Woody Haut (Hampstead & Highgate)

PARTY INVOLVEMENT IN LABOUR GROUP ELECTIONS

While it is obvious that the Party should be involved in Group elections, how this is done must seriously be considered . Most of the Party has expressed a preference for Option 1 (the Special Joint Meeting) . Yet Holborn & St Pancras GMC has maintained that it will only agree to Option 5 (the Participatory Ballot) . This is despite the fact that a number of branches in that CLP have said that they would participate in a Special Joint Meeting . Because a minority should not dictate Party policy, some kind of compromise must be considered .

The Participatory Ballot has a number of problems, in particular its inflexibility . If a councillor is defeated when standing for one position, s/he would be unable to stand for any other . Furthermore, a councillor could not wait until the last moment before standing and still be endorsed by the Party. How is the Party supposed to have the information that will enable it to elect councillors to some 40 posts? The election would be focussed on names rather than policies, and members would vote for councillors who have been most often in the press .

The Ballot in its present form would mean that delegate democracy is replaced with uninformed democracy . People would vote who have seldom or never been to a branch meeting and might have little knowledge of the council . It seems important that there is a body that takes responsability for any decision and which can act as a check on the Group . Are coun illors supposed to go around every branch in the space of a week? Will hustings be done at a central place where only a handful of members will come and listen, or will statements be circulated? No matter how hustings are arranged, they could not, given the complexity of the Participatory Ballot overcome the above problems.

Option 5 does not have amajority in the Party, and there is no constitutional link between the Ballot and the Group . Because there now exists such a link between the LGC/Borough Conference and the Group, some kind of compromise between Options 1 and 5 is needed .

Woody Haut (Hampstead & Highgate)

SOCIALIST POLICIES FOR A LABOUR VICTORY !

Conference organised by "Labour Briefing", March 28 & 29, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton .

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