CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING

December 1988

A RESPONSE TO THE BUDGET STRATEGY PAPER

IN THE AUTUMN of 1987 the Camden Labour Group adopted the strategy of 'Caring Cuts'. It was argued that it was better for Labour to stay 'legal' because to let the Tories in would be much worse. Along with many Labour Party members, the Manifesto Group of Councillors rejected this strategy.

The dismantling of local government is part of the Tories' plans to dismantle the welfare state. Financial restraints, rate-capping, the Housing Bill, the Local Government Act, the Education Act and the Poll Tax are all part of this strategy. To stay in office means isolation from our communities and the implementation of Tory legislation by a Council elected to implement a socialist manifesto.

In the past year, Camden has cut its budget by 24% with a loss of 3,000 jobs.

This financial year we are being asked to agree to a further round of cuts totalling £27 million. A £17 million package of cuts has already been identified.

1. Vacancy rates to be kept at 10% across the board. At present the vacancy rate is already 10%, but overtime and agency staff are being used to cover essential vacancies.
2. A further rent increase of £3.
3. Sale of council accommodation.
4. 7% cuts across all services and the absorption of inflation.
5. Financial measures yet to be identified.
6. Between 20-25% cuts to the Voluntary Sector.

The above still leaves £10 million to be found by march 1989.

The next 2 years up to 1991, when there may be a General Election, seem no more optimistic for local government:

* The Housing Act will become law on 1.4.89.
* Subsidy from the rates to keep Council rents low will be stopped by law in April 1990 leading to an average rent rise of £25 per week.
* Registration for the Poll Tax starts in April '89.
* Camden will still be rate-capped in 1989/90.

There are no managerial/financial solutions to the present crisis. Thatcher's project to smash the power and democracy of local government continues apace. By May 1990 (the next local elections) little will be left of 'Caring Camden' services. Rather we will have a council which is Labour in name only. What are we going to offer the electorate - more cuts?

The political options that face us now are no different from those of 1987, but the circumstances are. Do we want to see a Labour party further divided, a workforce further demoralised, services inadequate for the needs of our communities?

We need to adopt a radically different strategy. One based on resistance to the onslaught of Thatcherism. A strategy which will have to be agreed with our trade unions, the voluntary sector, community groups and tenants associations.

LGC WITCH-HUNT

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the Local Government Committee in Camden agreed to draw up a panel of prospective candidates in order to replace Labour members, should they be disqualified.

Getting onto a panel of candidates is usually a straight-forward business.

Every nominee has to complete a questionaire, and then sign a statment to the effect that they will abide by Labour Group Standing Orders.

By the beginning of October, nominations had been received by the Local Government Committee from both of Camden's Constituency Parties, and a special meeting of the Local Government Committee was held on the 19th.

By one vote, two candidates were rejected. John White who had been nominated by Holborn & St Pancras, and Steven Taylor who had been nominated by Hampstead & Highgate. Both of them on the left of the Party. In a number of other cases, the voting was extremely close.

No reason was given for rejecting the two Party members, but it was an obvious political rejection of left wingers.

Hampstead & Highgate CLP agreed to appeal against the decision to reject Steven Taylor at their General Committee meeting at the end of the month. The decision was carried without one single person voting against.

In the past, right wing candidates rejected by the Local Government Committee in Camden have always been reinstated by the Regional Executive.

The Appeal was held at Walworth Road on Sunday 27 November. Steven Taylor was represented by the Chair and Secretary of Hampstead & Highgate CLP, and the Local Government Committee by Martin Plaut and Shakoo Woodrow.

No objection had been raised at the Panel meeting regarding Steven Taylor's suitability, and there was no reason given for the LGC's decision to reject his nomination.

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However, Martin Plaut as Chair of the LGC, argued that since the correct procedures had been followed, there were no grounds for reinstating Steven Taylor onto the panel. Additionally, he produced a dossier of articles and statements written or signed by Steven Taylor and argued that, since these were critical of the ruling Labour Group in Camden then Steven Taylor was guilty of bringing the Party into disrepute and not fit to be a candidate. This had not been agreed by either the LGC, its Executive or its Officers.

The Appeals Committee, after reading the dossier, said it had no bearing on the Appeal! They then proceeded to reject the Appeal on the grounds that since all the correct procedures had been followed, there was nothing that they could do.

The implications of this decision are extremely far-reaching. In effect, it means that any Local Government Committee can reject any candidate on any grounds, and that, provided correct procedures have been followed, there is no right of appeal.

In political terms, it sets a precedent. It means that whichever political opinion is in the majority on a Local Government Committee, then that majority can reject all nominations which do not reflect their political tendency.

The failure to uphold an Appeal under these circumstances signals not merely a victory for 'new realism' but an entirely new reality.

The new reality is that candidates of the left, irrespective of their experience and qualifications, are no longer acceptable even for consideration, never mind selection and election. Scary stuff comrades.

Fred Leplat (Somers Town).

NEXT MEETING OF

CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING

Monday 16 January, 8pm
Town Hall, Judd St.

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The mid-term manifesto
A COUNTERATTACK

THE ONLY THING which the manifesto promises is further cuts in staff and services. If the manifesto is addressed to the Labour Group, then it is asking them to repudiate the platform on which they were elected; if it is addressed to the electorate then it is a useless and unnecessary document.

Implicit in the promise to reorganise is a submission to the principles of Government thinking. Thatcherite terms _ 'waste' and 'inefficiency' - are used unquestioningly and there is no attempt to defend the Council's employees from these allegations. Under *Standard of Services* the document can only say that the Council 'regrets' being unable to meet the wishes of Camden people!

In the *Housing* section the manifesto refers to helping those in need and follows on with 'we will combat squatting' as though squatters were not among the number of those in need. This is pandering to prejudice. Holborn & St Pancras GMC also voted down an amendment to keep rent rises below inflation!

The section on *Education*, is very thin: it contains a promise to ensure that ILEA's example will continue (even though it is likely that resources will be at 60% of their present level).

Throughout it is clear that a strategy is not in existence to match deeds to words; as in the statement that the effects of Section 28 will be minimised without any indication of how this will be done. There are vague, empty promises about creches and childminding - from a Council that has decimated nursery provision.

And so it goes on. Under the grand heading *Fairness*, noble sounding references to promoting equality of opportunity and supporting victims of discrimination are given without the faintest hint of how these aims are to be achieved. The manifesto patronisingly talks about fostering tolerance for minority groups (not combatting racism). Holborn & St Pancras CLP have tried to weaken the document still further by refusing to include any reference to the Race, Women's and Lesbian and Gay committees. In the section headed *Our Workforce*, Holborn & St Pancras' amendment refers to recent job losses and its gratitude to 'some of our unions' for their co-operation. A Labour Council is apparently only grateful to those unions who meekly agreed to the loss of their own members' jobs. An amendment against compulsory redundancies was also voted down by the GMC.

If Labour in Camden is asking for the allegiance of voters, then it needs to present them with something more specific and crusading than the mid-term manifesto.

Pat Nightingale (Camden ward)