CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING

No. 2. December 83/January 84

PAY THE RESIDENTIAL WORKERS

The NALGO residential workers'strike is causing conflict in many Labour controlled boroughs -- and Camden is no exception. Many left councillors are arguing that their claim is excessive. What are the facts ?

- an average residential social worker takes home around £80 p.w.
- because of staff shortages they are forced to work very l g hours - whatever their notional working week
- they work in poor conditions - often at unsocial hours

They are asking for a pay increase and shift working and unsocial hours payments.

The problem facing Camden and other Labour councils is this: the claim by this group of workers is eminently fair and just. If it was a claim to a private company no socialist would hesitate to support it. Unfortunately the employers in this case are the council -- us. The dispute highlights our dilemma over local authority management. If granted, the claim will put money on the rates, and if we hold down the rates we will only do so at the expense of workers and services.

As socialists we are committed to improving the standard of living for working people. This means a refusal to make cuts or redundancies no matter what pressure is put on the council by the government. Sooner or later we must recognise that withdrawal of grants and rate-capping makes balancing of the council's books and socialist policies impossible. Our reaction can take only one form -- open defiance and confrontation with the government.

In the case of the social workers the negotiating body for the employers is the National Joint Council (NJC). Despite the fact that the claim has been outstanding for 5 years the employers are refusing to negotiate. In Bury and Southwark the SPG has been used to evict children from homes -- it is becoming a very bitter dispute. NALGO wants a national settlement -- otherwise workers in less well organised areas, often with Tory councils, will get a bad deal or perhaps nothing at all. They are asking Labour councils to put pressure on the NJC by giving an under-taking to support the claim. But few councils are prepared to do that. Camden, along with many other London Labour authorities, wants to reach agreement through the Association of London Authorities (ALA). Any London deal would weaken a national fight.

It is time for the Labour group to stop indefinitely postponing a fight with the government. No campaign against rate-capping will be successful without backing from council workers. The campaign must start now -- with support for the residential workers national claim and a commitment on the coming year's budget for no cuts or redundancies, no rent rises, no rate rises and no cooperation with rate-capping.

OPEN EDITORIAL MEETINGS CAMDEN LABOUR CLUB: 3rd MONDAY EVERY MONTH, 9pm

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CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING DIARY DATES:

Thursday 24th November - Reg Race speaking on developments post conference.
8 p.m. Labour Centre Hall, 8 Camden Rd, NW1.

Saturday 10th December - Social and disco. Music, late bar etc
Tickets only £1 on the door.
8 p.m. till late. Cock Tavern, Chalton St, NW1.

Thursday 26th January - Labour and Ireland. A speaker from ICT.
8 p.m. Labour Centre Hall, 8 Camden Rd, NW1.