LABOUR GROUP DISCIPLINE • MANIFESTO COUNCILLORS' RESPONSE

We have now had the opportunity to read the document prepared by Alan Woods regarding Labour Group discipline. Alan proposes that all Labour Councillors should be asked to sign a statement to the effect that they will abide by the Standing Orders of the Group. Any Councillors who refuse to sign, or who sign and then subsequently break the Standing Orders, will automatically have the Whip withdrawn for an initial period of six weeks, at the end of which there will be a review and either continuation or cessation of the disciplinary action.

Our collective position with regard to Standing Ordrs in unequivocal. We are prepared to abide by Standing Orders provided that they are applied in order to implement the Manifesto on which we were elected. For us, this is the central issue. The Standing Orders of any organisation exist in order to furthur the aims and objectives of that organisation. As far as we are concerned, the majority of Labour Councillors have forfeited - by their abandonment of the Manifesto, by their refusal to consult the local Parties, trade unions and community organisations, by their introduction of Tory cuts and Tory policies - the aims and objectives of the labour movement in Camden. We were selected and elected in order to resist cuts, in order to defend working class communities, and in order to defend and extend services and jobs. This was a promise that was given in 1986, and it is a promise that we intend to keep.

I would remind Party members that our opposition to the policies being implemented by the Group leadership is supported at every level of the labour movement. The overwhelming majority of trade unionists, community organisations, women's groups, lesbian and gay organisations, black and ethnic minority groups, individual issue organisations and voluntary groups, have openly and consistently supported our demand that a socialist Council should not be responsible for implementing Tory policies.

However, we are being threatened with the withdrawal of the Whip not on the grounds that we have overturned or changed the Group's policies. We are being threatened with disciplinary action purely on the grounds that we are critical and cannot support the leadership's policies. This is hypocrisy of the highest order.

During the rate-capping campaign, nine Labour Councillors actually destroyed the Party's entire strategy by voting with the Tories. Tony Dykes was Chief Whip at the time. No action was ever taken against these Councillors. Similarily, within the present Group, Councillors on the right who have consistently flouted Standing Orders, who have done everything in their power to undermine Group policy and policy decisions, have never had any action taken against them. We are being singled out by the Group leadership for the simple reason that they can no longer tolerate opposition. In effect, they are saying that they can no longer tolerate democracy. They can no longer tolerate the call for resistan e which is being put forward, not only by ourselves, but by an entire cross-section of the community and workers in the Borough.

We would argue that it is cruciak that we remain within the Group. Not only in order to defend the Manifesto, defend jobs and services, defend the rights and aspirations of working class communities, but also in order to put forward an alternative view and an alternative strategy within the Group. If we are removed from the Group, it will effectively remove any opposition to the cuts policies and compliance strategy which is being followed by the leadership. It would be a signal to the workers and communities in Camden that the surrender of the Party to the Tories is complete, and it will do irrepairable damage to the standing of the Party and the likelihood of building resistance to planned and future Tory legislation.

The issue of discipline within the Group is obviously important. But discipline is not an end in itself. Discipline is only applicable where agreed policies and strategies are being implemented. The current leadership have neither policies nor strategy beyond surrender. The paper which is being put forward by the leadership is nothing more than an attempt to prevent the inadequacies and failures of their leadership being discussed openly and democratically.

We would also remind Party members that between 1974 and 1979, a certain Neil Kinnock voted against the Labour Whip over 70 times in parliament. This was in the context of a minority Labour government with a wafer thin majority. The Group leadership would have presumably expelled him from the Parliamentary Labour Party!

Yours for socialism,

Kate Allen, Steve Bevington, Angela Birtill, Graham Good, Caroline Holding, Dave Horan, Gloria Lazenby, Karen Newbury, Sandra Plummer, Graham Shurety, Adrian States.