THE NEW LABOUR GROUP : WHICH WAY FOR THE LEFT ?

For the past two years, the leadership of the Labour Group has been in an alliance with the right wing. The results of the May Labour Group AGM marks a shift to the left. Many members of the leadership simply ran out of patience with the right wing who had formerly control of Staff, Housing and Grant Committees. They became fed up and appalled at the veritable war zone created by the right wing in relation to industrial and community relations, and the right wing's blatant anti-equal opportunies position.

However, it would be a mistake to believe there has as a result been a shift of policy on the part of the leadership. The Budget cuts agreed at the end of March remain in place and there is still an absence of policy towards both central government and ongoing legislation. This is in spite of the fact that the next 12 months will be decisive for the Labour Party in Local Government.

The Poll Tax simply closes down options. It prevents even the charade of spending being directed at those in greatest need because it is people in greatest need who will be forced to pay the highest price for council services. There is no sympathetic way of administering the Poll Tax. It is the catch 22 of Conservatism. We believe that the Poll Tax must be utterly rejected. Not only by the workforce and communities of Carden, but also by their elected representatives. Labour authorities should be looking at ways of not implementing this Tax, and linking up with those prepared to refuse to pay.

The Housing Act could well mean the end of socially responsible housing, and the Local Government & Housing Bill will put council rents out of reach of those most in need. It places local authorities in the position of Rachmans, forced to inflict the increases and prosecute those who cannot pay.

The continuing privatisation of Council services will remove control of those services from the local communities and places them under the direct control of private capital. It will mean continuing job losses and continuing collapse in the quality and the range of services.

We have argued for the past two years that the cuts are totally unacceptable, and that service provision based on the dictates of the market place is a contradiction in terms for the Labour Party. After the defeat of the miners and the rate-capping campaign in 1985 and the re-election of the Tories in 1987, many comrades felt that Thatcher could not be defeated and on that basis went for the "limited damage" option. The Euro-election results, the surge in militant industrial action, and the disaray of Lawson and Thatcher over the ever increasing present financial mess demonstrates that the Tories can be beaten.

We will continue to argue against any further cuts and align ourselves with those workers and communities who are bearing the brunt of Tory policies. This forms the basis of our position within the Labour Group and the Labour Movement.

If we are to be successful in re-aligning the Council towards our workforce and the communities, we must begin the process of building resistance to the oncoming Tory legislation immediately. We are totally committed to re-building the links between the Council and the Party, between Socialism and the working class, and between a programme of direct resistance and the entire community. We ask you to join us in this campaign.

8 August 1989

Councillors Kate Allen, Angie Birtill, Graham Goode, Mary Helsdon, Caroline Holding, Dave Horan, Gloria Lazenby, Sandra Plummer, Graham Shurety and Adrian States.