fred

for discussion at Thurs meeting — please pass on a copy to Pierce.

A STRATEGY TO TAKE US BEYOND THE CUP FINAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Introduction

At the last Borough Conference we implicitly supported a strategy of non-confrontation. We supported the Leadership's position of a balanced budget. We did this because it was believed that it would be possible to get through the current financial year without cuts in either jobs or services, and because it was believed that there would also be room for some growth.

We amended the Leadership's document in an attempt to ensure that the Budget was kept under scrutiny by the Party - via the LGC - and we identified certain areas where growth should be seen as a priority. (These just haven't happened)

The 'paper' exercise of identifying savings and instigating departmental reviews is becoming, in practice, a mechanism for implementing cuts, reducing services, and preventing growth.

The 'promise' of a balanced budget, no cuts in jobs and services, and some growth, is no longer viable. Management are already looking for savings in their departments, Councillors are already contemplating an increase in Council rents, and industrial action against the various reviews is already taking place.

Options

In the circumstances there are a number of options open to us.

1. We can use our position to put pressure on the Leadership of the Labour Group to stop this initial cycle of cuts, reviews and savings. We can do this on the basis of giving our political support to the Leadership and strengthening that Leadership by becoming part of it - occupying positions within Group and agreeing to take on various Committee Chairs.
   The Union leadership have already indicated that they would like to see Left Councillors occupying the Chairs of Building Works & Services, Social Services, Staff & Management, and Housing Management.
   In adopting this strategy it may be possible to stop this initial cycle of cuts and to ameliorate the worst excesses of Management as they attempt to find a way of balancing the books.
   Additionally, by adopting this strategy, it may be possible to force a majority in the Labour Group into supporting a no cuts policy in the immediate future.
   This strategy should also allow us to prevent the Right from occupying any key positions on the Council.

2. We can accept that it is going to be impossible to 'balance the books' and we can adopt an openly confrontational stanch towards the Leadership of the Group. In effect, we would begin to argue openly - within the Group, the Party, the Unions and the community - for a defecit budget and open defiance of Central Government.
   We would not give our support to the Leadership, but we would demand their support for our position. Neither would we occupy positions on the Group or as Committee Chairs.
   In effect, we accept that the 'battle' within the Group is already lost and turn our attention and energies outwards, aligning ourselves with those sections of the Party who will support us, and those sections of the workforce and the community who will be at the sharp end of the proposed cuts.

3. We can attempt to adopt both the above options. We accept that it is going to be impossible to 'balance the books', but support any attempts by the Leadership to prevent massive cuts in jobs and services and lessen the impact of projected cuts by occupying positions within the Group. Our involvement in the Group would essentially be strategic - aiming to block certain proposals whilst encouraging others. We would be critical of the Leadership on specific proposals, but continue to give our general support to their broad intentions, which are well-meaning but confused.

Conclusions

There are problems with all three options (and the numerous variations), but 1 and 3 both tend towards a position of active involvement in the day-to-day management of the Council's financial crisis, wheras 2 frees us from this responsibility and allows us the chance to develop political positions within the parties, the unions and the wider community.
Additionally, 1 and 3 give a credibility to the Group that I don't believe is tenable in the long term, and this assessment is based on a consideration of the Balance of Forces on the Group and in the Council Chamber.

Any attempt to classify people in this way is bound to offend someone and I apologise in advance for any offense that this will cause. However, I do believe that it is important that we have some idea of the political allegiances that exist within the Group and the likely effects of these questions to wider political questions.

I have categorised Councillors under three broad headings: those who have demonstrated a broad degree of agreement with the positions advocated by the Left; those who I believe are primarily aligned around the Leadership (for a variety of reasons); and those who are firmly aligned with the Right.

LEFT 16 (17)	LEADERSHIP 13	RIGHT 14
Allen*	+Beck	Budd
Bevington*	+Devote	Cane
Birtill*	+Dykes	Cosin
(Holding*)	+Field	Denny
Lazenby*	+Fitzgerald	Green
Plummer*	+Hughes	Griffiths
Shurety*	+Sumray	Hulme
States*	+Woods	Kirk
Gill	Horan -	Kutapan
Good	Orrett -	Latham
Head	Pope -	Saunders
Lowe	Rippington -	Shaw
McDonnell	Wakeham -	Smyth
Newbury		Williams
Peacock		
Roy		
Turner		

KEY: * Briefing Supporter
+ Possible to win over to Left
- Likely to go over to Right

Of the 43(44) Labour Councillors, our most objective scenario on broad policy issues is likely to be 24(25) against 19. This would give the broadened Left a majority in the Labour Group of 5(6), which may be difficult to sustain but which is probably workable in terms of the Group. It is also important to remember that both the Local Government Committee and Borough Conference are likely to continue supporting Left policies and strategy.

However, in addition to the 43(44) Labour Councillors, there are 13 Tories and 2 Alliance Councillors, which gives a total of 58(59) Councillors.

In order to ensure the implementation of Left policies we need 30 Councillors to vote for them. While this is likely in circumstances which do not bring us into direct conflict with Central Government, it is highly unlikely that we can sustain a majority in circumstances which might mean that the Councillors are acting illegally - leaving them open to surcharge and disqualification.

I think that we can take it for granted that the 14 Right Councillors will vote against any policies which might render them liable to surcharge, it only needs 2 more Labour Councillors to vote with them - from the 5 who are 'likely' to go over to the Right - in order to render a Left majority in the Group redundant.

In these circumstances, it is impossible to win a position of confrontation/ illegality in Full Council.

I believe that this is a key element in our strategy towards the Group. To

put it simply, when the crunch comes, the Group can't deliver, and if we base our political strategy on the Group we are leading our supporters into a cul-de-sac.

The first and third options that I outlined are based on the premise that the Group is worth fighting for, and while this is undoubtedly true in terms of the immediate defence of jobs and services, it is certainly not true when it comes to developing a strategy for the long term defence of jobs and services - which will inevitably lead us into confrontation with Central Government.

At this point, a large minority within the Group (possibly even a majority), and certainly a majority within the Council, will be in the position of arguing for cuts on whatever scale is necessary to prevent illegality.

We need to begin to develop a strategy which is based on this awareness. We need to explain our position and we need to build support for it, and it is in this context that we must approach the Group Elections.

Group Elections

Even before the elections take place, there are two arguements that need to be won within the Group. The first is that the Group accept the legitimacy of the Joint Group/LGC meeting, and the second is the need for open ballots on the Group when implementing the Joint Meeting's decision.

A failure to win either of these positions indicates, in advance, that a majority of the Group are simply not prepared to accept either the legitimacy of party involvement in Group elections, or a widening of democracy when it goes against their interests.

Imperfect as the Joint Meeting might be, it is still a significant improvement on the existing mechanism for electing the Leader and other positions on the Council and within the Group.

I believe that it is essential that anyone who stands for election needs to endorse these two criteria before we give them our support.

Secondly, snd more importantly, our support for candidates must also be based on their political position within the Group. It is for this reason that we need to draw up a statement of principle that puts the defence of jobs and services before the need to 'balance the books'. This could be a general statement, or something more specific, perhaps listing those policy areas which we consider to be of primary importance:
No Cuts in Jobs & Services; Honouring Trade Union Agreements; No Increase in Council Rents, and so on.

I think that it's difficult to argue that no Left Councillors should stand for election, but I do see difficulties for Left Councillors who accept responsibility for Committees (and within the Group), and who are then placed in the uneviable position of selling cuts policies to the Unions and the community. Personally, I believe that this places those Councillors in an impossible position and in these circumstances, I see no alternative for Left Councillors except either a: don't stand in the first place, or b: stand on the assumption that you'll be resigning very soon.

I believe that it might be possible for Left candidates for stand for positions which are not immediately in the firing line, or where they can turn those positions to their advantage e.g. appealing over the heads of the Group to the organisations which comprise the constiuents of their Committee. But even this, in practice, is fraught with difficulties. Councillors who adopt positions of responsibility will be held responsible when cuts are imposed, and this will severly limit their political flexibility.

The Group positions are similarily problematic. The Left does not command an overall majority within the Group, and challenging the current Leadership, and winning, will probably alienate those Councillors who have been displaced and might otherwise have supported Left policies.

As I stated in the list of options, standing for key positions does inhibit Left Councillors from building support for Left policies outside the Council Chamber. Additionally, the sheer volume of work for Committee Chairs severely

restricts their capacity to work outside the Council apparatus.

My own view is that we should only contest key positions if the Group are prepared to accept the mandate of the Joint Meeting, and that our political programme is spelt out clearly in advance.

Strategy

I believe that it is obvious that our local government strategy needs to go beyond the confines of the Council Chamber. We need to win the position of no cuts in the parties; we need to align ourselves with the Unions against cuts that are already being imposed; we need to work alongside community organisations which are already engaged in conflict with the Council; and we need to begin building support in those areas where we have traditionally been weak e.g. Council tenants and the fight against rent increases.

The role of Councillors within this strategy, will be to use their positions both inside and outside the Council to win support for a political programme which is based on the defence of jobs and services - not, primarily, within the Group, but within those constiuentcies where our support already exists. i.e, the Party, the Unions and the community.

What Is To Be Done

I believe that we need two statements: one of policy and one of practice.
I would suggest that the Policy statements should contain:
Defence of the Manifesto
Defence of Jobs & Services
Honouring Trade Union Agreements
No Increase in Council Rents
Withdrawal From the Police Consultative Committee
Commit[redacted] to Equal Opportunities/Positive Action
I would suggest that the statement of Practice should contain:
Acceptance of the validity of the Joint Group/LGC Meeting
Opposition to secret ballots on Group
Involvement of the Party in the Budget Strategy
Involvement of the Party in all major policy decisions
I believe that these two statements should be distributed throughout the Party and should form the basis of our approach to the Group elections and our involvement in the Group afterwards. We should attempt to secure as many signatories as possible from members of the Group, but we should also attempt to secure the support of the Town Hall Trade Unions for the policy statement.

If the Group refuse to accept either the statements of policy or practice, which seems likely, then I believe that we need to turn outwards with those basic demands to the parties, the Unions and the wider community. In effect, we begin organising openly not against the Leadership, but against the imposition of cuts and policies to which we are diametrically opposed.

I would suggest a Conference to launch this opposition, but we would also need to prepare the ground through Camden Briefing and through discussion in our Branches and Parties.

None of the above should be considered a definitive statement of intent, but I think that it does give us something to think about before the next meeting, and at least react against. I think that it's important that we do come to the next meeting with proposals rather than attitudes - be those defensive or aggressive.

Steven Taylor

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i.e. I've only sent copies to comrades who regularly attend meetings and not the Camden Journal, Hampstead Advertiser, Hampstead & Highgate Express, etc.