LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING

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ONLY WAY TO FIGHT RATECAPPING: NO RATE!

As the consequences of the 'no rate' strategy loom closer, it is not surprising that many councillors are desperately searching for a softer, yet acceptable option. Many have seized upon deficit budgeting as the honourable fall-back position. After all, they reason, it was an option under consideration in the campaign, why not resurrect it now?

The trouble is the definition of 'deficit budgeting' seems to have changed in the intervening months. Then it was proposed as a means for spending to the level demanded by the Labour budget, regardless of the legal rate limit. The shortfall would illustrate the gap between the Labour and the Tory assessment of the community's needs. It would certainly have involved confronting the government once the money ran out and was only rejected because, as a strategy, it would affect different authorities at different periods throughout the year, unlike the 'no rate' stance.

Deficit Fudgeting

However, the version currently being touted round town is more like deficit fudgeting than budgeting. The rhetoric is as defiant as ever, but the budgets are designed to please the District Auditor not the community or workforce. Rent rises, higher charges for everything, an end to all overtime, custom and practice agreements revoked, vacancies frozen . . . are all methods for getting through the year, not resisting rate-capping.

True, the Councils adopting this strategy have avoided compulsory redundancies, but their definition of a 'no cuts' budget may differ from trade unionists' understanding of the phrase. Freezing vacancies cuts jobs opportunities and may involve extra work for others (though many unions are toughening up their 'no cover' policy where vacancies have been frozen already) – as well as reducing the service.

Those councils which adopt a hard-line budget in an attempt to survive the next year are creating a terrible set of problems for themselves. They are putting themselves against workers by attacking working rights and conditions; they are setting themselves against tenants and local people by raising rents and charges; and they are destroying any chance of a joint campaign against rate-capping next year.

LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING MEETINGS

"The fight against ratecapping"
Wednesday 1st May at 7.30pm
County Hall, Room 143
Speakers:
John McDonnell (Deputy Leader, GLC)
Johanna Fawkes (London Bridge)
Speaker from Hackney Council

Rebuilding the Left
Lessons of the miners' strike
Wednesday 15th May at 7.30pm
County Hall, Room 143
Speakers:
Tony Benn
Kay Sutcliffe
Sharon Atkins
Sarah Roelofs

By highlighting the dangers of the phoney deficit budgeting approach it may be possible to prevent that exit route being taken.

In some authorities trade unions are still working with the Councillors to salvage as much as possible from the wreck. In Leicester the unions have been offered four seats on every Council committee to highlight and object to any 'hidden' cuts. And Lewisham is consulting members on a joint monitoring board, whereby all budget proposals would be screened by Councillors and trade unionists to ensure there were no cuts. Where there is a clear commitment from the Councillors that they are still fighting rate-capping, this could work – though it is not clear what evidence they have offered that they will be prepared to confront the government later, when they've run out of money, having avoided confrontation now.

Those councillors striving to stick by the "no-rate" position face immense difficulties – but what are the alternatives? There are none. Urging the trade unions to mobilise is all very well – but we cannot expect much industrial action while councillors hover nervously on the brink of illegality.

The 'no rate' strategy needs triggers: action by the state against democratically elected representatives is the strongest basis for trade union and community mobilisation.

Johanna Fawkes,
(London Bridge)

LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!

HACKNEY: STAND FIRM AND SIT TIGHT!

By Councillor Martin Whitfield

"Stand firm" and "sit tight" was the deliberate mixed metaphor used by Hackney Council leader, Hilda Kean, to point the direction for the Labour Group in the face of legal action over rate-capping. Both phrases are important and the stance was adopted without dissent by the group following a ruling by a High Court judge that he would order the Council to make a rate if it did not do so willingly.

Hackney must "stand firm" on the policy of non-compliance with the Rates Act and in its defence of local jobs and services. It must also "sit tight" and not, through panic, take crisis action because of the judge's ruling.

Such a position has the support of all those most vital to the campaign's success locally, trade unions, community groups, tenants, black groups and both Hackney Labour Parties.

Wider responsibility

The leadership is also aware of a wider responsibility. As a result of the court case, Hackney has been pushed by the media to the front of the joint campaign over rate-capping and the penalty grant system. Any retreat would be seized upon and used to weaken the resolve of other councils.

The next test for the Council will come now at the usual April council meeting (April 24th) by which time Hackney will know what Justice Woolf has in store. Opinion suggests that without any indication from the Council that it intends to set a rate – which he is not going to get – he will order that a rate is fixed by a certain date, likely to be that crucial April 24th meeting.

Much has been made of the pressure this will place on individual councillors but successful resistance also increases the stakes for the government as it will mean the prospect of fines, surcharge and disqualification for democratically elected members. And who is going to run the council then? Under what authority? And with a hostile workforce?

Minefield ahead

Even Justice Woolf was aware of the minefield ahead when he said he would order the council with "great reluctance bearing in mind that a local authority is a democratically elected body responsible for representing the views of its electors."

All the figures presented on Hackney's finances indicate that it is still impossible to make a rate legally without significant cuts in jobs and services. The gap, even with creative accounting, is £10 million between spending and government limit.

These figures and the political truths behind them, has meant that those members of Labour Group wishing to escape illegality have not been able or willing to come forward with an alternative.

Any legal cuts budget could only go through with the backing of Liberals and Tories. The position can only change after Hackney, combined with other local authorities, forces more resources from the government.

LONDON BRIDGE: SEEKING A FOCUS



Lambeth Labour Councillors and community united, March 7th. Dave Stewart

The events of the National Demonstration on March 6th, organised by the TUC against Ratecapping, and the Council Meetings the following day, seem further away than one month. At that time there was every expectation that a 'trigger' precipitating a call for widespread strike action was imminent, and that significant Court actions against Councillors, the appointment of Receivers and Commisioners, and punitive action against Trade Unionists, was not too far away. The resolution passed at the Conference of the National Local Government Co-Ordinating Committee at Liverpool on March 30th, attended by over 300 delegates from 40 Authorities, echo ed this concern that the Joint Shop Stewards Committees must be ready for a major event in this war upon the jobs they protect and the services they provide.

It is of great concern that the creeping and relentless strategic method of the Government against local democracy, has brought the Rates Act and Green Paper, 'Competition in the Provision of Local Authority Services, DOE Feb 1985', together with massive reductions in Housing Investment, to this point without a major mobilising focus. All know that the further along the path of this legislation local authority workers travel, the greater danger to the principles of the present struggle, and that job loss, loss of services, and the further breakup of communities will result. The Councillors who have stood by their decision not to comply with rate-capping provisions are applauded, and the photograph shows a public gallery full of Trade Unionists, a scene enacted in other London Town Halls. This support will continue.

'London Bridge' has met 3 times while Hackney Council was in Court. The main task now is to strengthen links and organisations. Many forms of action are under discussion, and displays of support for the Labour Councils, together with reaction to expected Court decisions, and the more traditional methods to fight cuts, will be brought together as policy. There is a feeling that although Councils will not be given any excuses to operate recruitment freezes, or carry out reorganisations designed to cut, the focus of trade union attention must remain with the Government who have orchestrated with a sympathetic media, an unusually vicious campaign against living standards, job security, job opportunity, the employment rights of women, and the strength of trade unions.

Edmund Hall (Secretary London Bridge)

HARINGEY RIGHT CAPITULATES

Haringey Council bowed out of the anti-rate-capping campaign in the early hours of Friday April 12th. A combination of centre and right wing Labour members and the Tories set a rate increase of 14%; in the process all the reserves have been used up and a programme of cuts will be necessary if a balanced budget is to be achieved by March 1986.

In a week of fast-moving events, the two GCs – Tottenham and Hornsey/Wood Green – met on Tuesday evening and reaffirmed the "no-rate" stance, the same tactic was passed by the LGC and referred to a meeting of the Labour Group. During the Party meetings, there was little dissent on a tactic that had been widely discussed at every level over the past ten months.

At the Group meeting, the leader, George Meehan and the deputy leader, Angela Greately, opposed the LGC recommendation. Despite this, the tactic was carried by 19-15, whereupon the leadership resigned. An acting leadership of the Chief Whip, Toby Harris and Group Secretary, Ernie Large was appointed at 2.30 a.m. on Wednesday April 10th to lead the Group at the Council meeting on Thursday night.

The Council meeting began amidst an atmosphere of considerable threat and intimidation. Nearly two hours before the meeting was due to begin, there was a police siege in and around the building. The Chief Executive had instructed that those wishing to get to the Public Gallery had to wait outside in the rain – as if they were queuing up to get into the House of Commons!! In the Chamber, the threats from lawyers, accountants and other executives were flying thick and fast. The whole local state machinery had been mobilised to bully and cajole the councillors to set a rate – any rate – without any consideration of what its impact would be on the local community and the workforce. Local democracy was on its deathbed.

The Labour Group motion to defer the setting of the rate was taken first and – after three hours of debate – was defeated. Fourteen Labour members voted against Labour Group policy, including the former leader, George Meehan, GLC councillor (and aspiring MP) Tony McBrearty and AMA Chair of Education, Nikki Harrison. This outrageous act was repeated several times during the meeting when motions to adjourn the meeting were moved. This hypocrisy was compounded when the right wing rebels moved a rate and urged the left "to vote for party policy and save jobs and services".

Eventually, the Tories cracked. Despite their Group decision of not increasing rates by more than the rate of inflation, the Tories voted for a rate increase of nearly 14%.



John Chapman

11th April. Haringey collapses. Labour's right are jubilant. Cllr. Harrison applauds setting a rate.

The supporters of rate-capping helped to increase the rates by nearly three times their own minimum. The ghost of Patrick Jenkin will haunt Haringey Tories for many years to come.

Throughout the whole meeting, the unity of the Labour Group, Labour Party, the trade unions and community organisations did not crack. Throughout the no-rate position was supported vociferously both in the Chamber and the public gallery. This united front will become even more important as the cuts and privatisation legislation begins to bite. The new Labour leadership will be elected by a joint meeting of the LGC and the Group and will have the major task of bringing the Council back into the fight to keep our communities intact, to prevent job losses and to defeat the government.

The Party branches will no doubt discuss the disgraceful actions of those 14 Labour councillors who defeated the Labour Party in order to boost the forces of Thatcherite repression. For several months the right wing mouthed platitudes about rate-capping; when it came to the crunch, they cut and ran. They have forfeited any right to represent the Labour Party at any level at any time.

VOTING RECORD ON "NO-RATE" MOTION

FOR "NO RATE": 22 votes – Steve Banerji, Don Billingsley, Ron Blanchard, Clive Boutle, John Brennan, Ros Cave, Maureen Dewar, Bernie Grant, Bob Harris, Toby Harris, Phillip Jones, Steve King, Nigel Knowles, Ernie Large, Sharon Lawrence, Andy Love, Narendra Makanji, David McCullogh, Andreas Mikkides, Colin Sheriff, Pat Tonge, Chris Zissimos.

AGAINST "NO RATE": 13 votes and 22 Tories. Brian Bullard, Vic Butler, Jim Gardner, Eileen Garwood, Angela Greately, Nikki Harrison, Fred Knight, Paul Leach, Tony McBrearty, George Meehan, Max Morris, Beth Simon, Robin Young.

ABSTENTION: Viv Fenwick.

By Narendra Makanji,
Assistant Whip,
Haringey Council

LEWISHAM: THE STORY OF A SELL-OUT

Tony Gard,
(East Lewisham CLP)

Lewisham Council have a flag flying outside the town hall proclaiming their determination to defend local services. Before the council meeting on April 4th angry lobbiers kept out of the town hall by the police, lowered the flag to half-mast. As it turned out, it would have been more appropriate if we had taken it right down for our Labour councillors to walk over.

The Lewisham tragi-comedy on April 4th was the culmination of a long series of fudges and prevarications. The question for some weeks had been not if the Labour Group would collapse, but when and how. The large group of right wing councillors never made any secret of the fact that they would neither risk illegality nor resign their seats. The major problem was that the Left councillors, who occupied the leading positions, always put the "unity" of the Labour Group before the need for a clear, firm stand.

In the last week of March, when the Tories had requisitioned a special council meeting, the Labour Group voted by a narrow majority to open separate negotiations with Patrick Jenkin. This was headed off at the last minute, shortly before the special council meeting. As Councillor Jack Adams put it, their main concern was simply "to get through tonight". The group deferred setting a rate – for a whole week! – and agreed to look at "deficit budgeting". However this had nothing to do with genuine deficit budgeting as a basis for confrontation with the Tories; it was simply an excuse for setting a legal rate. This the group duly agreed to do, by a majority of one, on April 1st.



Stefano Cagnoni

Package of cuts

The decision to stay legal inevitably meant accepting a package of cuts, including rent increases of £1.50 to £2.00 a week, "action to restrict overtime, promote early retirement, or control recruitment", a £123,000 cut on internal work at Carrington House hostel for homeless men, and the sale of council mortgages.

For years Left councillors in Lewisham have said that they would fight if they had the backing of the unions. This argument is now exposed as pure hypocrisy. They had the backing of the unions for a policy of defiance. A joint union committee has been set up, affiliated to London Bridge. 1000 council workers supported the lobby on March 7th. It is the unions and the tenants who have not had the backing of the Labour councillors.

Occupied Council Chamber

At the council meeting of April 3rd, enraged council workers, supported by tenants and Labour Party members tired of fruitless lobbying, occupied the council chamber. Although we later withdrew to the public gallery the meeting was postponed to the following evening, on the grounds that our numbers represented a safety hazzard! We were assured by the Leader, Ron Stockbridge, and by Councillor Madeleine Long that the police would not be allowed into the town hall.

However when we turned up to lobby on the following evening we found that the police had been in the town hall since 1.00 p.m. It seemed that the council was going to sell us out with police protection. After several Labour councillors had gone in, deaf to the demand that they should stay out until the police were withdrawn, a section of the lobby used the arrival of an overweight right-winger to get past the police and into the chamber.

Later, when many more lobbiers had arrived, councillors gave into angry and persistent demands and let them into the town hall. However, nothing was done about the police presence. It was not an issue at the Labour Group meeting before the Council. Instead the Group decided by an increased majority to set the maximum legal rate. Only eleven voted against, and it was not clear how many of them would have broken the Group whip and voted against in full council. Councillor Clifton Graham was the only one who announced this publicly.

To get to the chamber, councillors had to pass through a police cordon. But none of the Labour Party members who had been in the Group meeting (in Lewisham all party members can attend these meetings) were allowed through. Seeing this, lobbiers formed a barricade and would not let councillors past without them. At this the Labour councillors were forced to turn back. It was then that the Tories inside the chamber held their now-infamous "council meeting". In fact it lasted barely a minute, the mace was not in the chamber, and the din created by the lobbiers who had got in earlier was so loud that it was impossible to hear what was happening. It now seems doubtful whether there is even an accurate record of the "meeting".

The Labour councillors scuttled off to another discussion. They did not call it a Labour Group meeting, presumably to keep out party members; it was described as a meeting with the mayor in the parlour. It was held behind a police cordon which handed out rough treatment to several Labour Party members who tried to get in. And what the councillors decided was to accept the legality of the Tories' "council meeting"!

Even after this they would not do anything about the police. The several hundred council workers, tenants and party members, not wishing to be the targets for harrassment, refused to leave the town hall while the police were there. It was left to the shop stewards to negotiate with the police and secure their withdrawal from the building.

It was significant that while the Left coun-

Lewisham: don't promise what you cannot deliver

Jim Mallory
Chair, East Lewisham CLP

Lewisham Labour Group has for months been seen as one of the weak links in the ratecapped councils' strategy of defiance. A divided and indecisive left leadership held captive by a right-wing group made Lewisham's early peeling off from the other boroughs predictable.

No-one, however, could have forseen the events which resulted on 4th April in a Tory rate being set in a Council chamber guarded by police and devoid of any Labour councillors. The night before, the Council meeting had been abandoned when the Tories refused to sit in front of an angry and overflowing audience of trade unionists, tenants and Party activists.

The chaos and confusion of the two nights surprised no-one who had observed Lewisham Labour Group agonising over how to avoid bowing out of the joint Labour groups' strategy of confrontation.

The Group was held to ransom by a small but crucial number of right-wingers (it only needed 7 Labour councillors to cross over to give the Tories a majority in setting the legal maximum rate) who had always made it cleear that they would not risk illegality, yet never showed the slightest intention of resigning and making way for others who would. Another, larger faction clearly never had much intention of breaking the law, either, but did not want to rock the boat early, thus allowing the left in the group under Leader Ron Stockbridge to maintain its unsteady unity with the rest of the Labour ratecapped councils.

At the same time, the public campaign of no cuts in services and jobs and no rent and rate rises — without ever involving widespread canvassing — did include the only posters in London to declare unequivocally a policy of no rent increases. Labour's natural constituency, council estates, couldn't be blamed for having high expectations.

As 7 March approached the Labour Group decided it needed to look at just what the implications of a ratecapped budget were. A Leader's Advisory Group was set up comprising Stockbridge, 4 group mbmers and 3 BLGC reps. The optimists hoped that its work would reveal just how savage the cuts could be, but the report also provided them with a blueprint of where the cuts could be made (a proposed £770,000 cut in repairs and maintenance of council housing has still to be rejected).

The group, along with other ratecapped groups, got by 7 March by deferring the rate — as opposed to refusing to set it. The right warned clearly that the resistance wouldn't last the month out.

The search for a lowest common denominator which would appease the right seemingly had ended on 26th March. They decided they could defer the rate if *individual* negotiations with the Department of Environment followed immediately. This move was so overwhelmingly rejeccted at a meeting with other Labour councils that Group accepted a last-minute proposal from Deputy Leader Paulette Goudge to adjourn the 28th March Council meeting to 3rd April in order to look at a possible deficit budget option.

Group meetings on 1st and 2nd April established by votes of 16-15 and 17-16 that the Group would set the maximum rate and pass a 'deficit' budget of 18 million, including job losses and a rent increase of £1.50 — a cuts budget.

They never got a chance to meet on 3rd April, of course. The next night the police cordon was tight and Tory councillors were inthe chamber when the Labour Group met in crisis because 9 of the councillors who had warned that they intended to stick to Party policy said they would vote *against* a Labour cuts budget. This was enough to ensure that a Tory budget would be passed if the Labour right then, having lost the Labour budget, supported the Tories.

Councillors were just finalising details on a compromise legal rate with a delayed budget when the news came that, meanwhile in the Council chamber, the Tories had set a rate. As this issue goes to press, Labour Group was still checking the legality of that rate.

The embarrassment of a Tory rate should not, however, overshadow the following:

1) as the fight had refused from the outset to stick to Party policy if it meant risking breaking the law, why did some left councillors feel any Group accountability — hope that their budget could be monitored and cuts blocked in committee with an unaccountable right were pious;

2) cuts proposals under a Tory budget would be much easier emotionally to vote down using the blocking majority tactic;

3) selective resignation, avoided as a tactic in all rate-capped groups, would have seen off the waverers;

4) a campaign in defence of jobs and services with no rent increases, linking Labour councillors prepared to stick to policy and Party activists, keeps Labour alive in Lewisham between now and May 1986 elections.

Lewisham may well be a lesson for other Labour groups still in the fight. That lesson is that raising people's expectations is dangerous if you cannot deliver.

The spectacle of bewildered Group members wondering what had gone wrong as they watched police and demonstrators clash will remain in the minds of those who were there for a long time. That the police were there at all is the most damning indictment of Lewisham Labour Group's failure to deliver.

cillors all blamed the mayor, Les Eytles, for calling the police, not one of them was prepared to do a single thing about it. Of course it is natural that councillors who have decided to stay within the law and do their duty as state functionaries should hide behind the police. It is more worrying that those councillors who opposed the legal rate could not see the importance of the issue.

NALGO branch secretary, Will Fancy described the outcome as "Not just a Tory budget, but a Tory-Police budget". NALGO's policy is not to service councillors if they vote for cuts and not process any cuts or rent increases. At the time of writing all the unions are due to hold mass meetings. Clearly if the fight is to continue the role of the unions is crucial, and they will be up against the majority of the Labour Group.

This does not mean that the minority who opposed the legal rate have no further role to play. They must continue to fight for Labour policy against the majority, working with the unions and rallying support for action. And they must do it publicly, with no sentimental nostalgia for the "unity of the Labour Group".

REGAINING MOMENTUM IN SOUTHWARK

On March 26th, Southwark Council met and reaffirmed their commitment to defer setting a rate. The continued unanimity of the Labour Group is a relief to many who had feared that the first signs of crumbling might occur at this stage, the first meeting since March 7th.

The Council and the large majority Labour Group are beset by rumours about the true state of affairs financially: some say that there will be enough money found from various "reserves" to get through *this year* without cuts. However, Southwark is also demanding the return of £130 million lost in rate support grant since 1980 and so this "strategy" doesn't yet have much support. Meanwhile Councillors are finding that the District Auditor is "putting the frighteners on". They have been told that certain payments after April 1st may be regarded as "unlawful expenditure" and the DA will not tell them which items these are until the last moment. "The boot could go in" says Andy Troke, Vice-Chair of Social Services.

Nick Snow, Chair of Housing, has argued in his ward that Southwark should stand firm. A lack of unity now will be fatal to the borough next year. The Council must hold on until it gets negotiations from Jenkin.

The feeling of solidarity has been a boost to Southwark councillors. Andy Troke says that he felt that they were all heartened by Lewisham's and Lambeth's decision to continue deferring the rate. However, in the light of recent events in Lewisham some of that encouragement has been inevitably lost. Another factor which has had considerable influence has been the strong backing of the Town Hall unions: the Joint Union Committee were maintaining pressure on the councillors, "unity of the workforce is crucial to the struggle" Troke declared.

Since March 7th much of the campaigning momentum has been lost, although the Council and CLPs are now working together to try to regain it. The Tories and SDP have come out with their usual rubbish, but new Labour leaflets are being written, street stalls being re-established, etc., in the hope of maintaining public interest and involvement in the Labour councillors' stand. With its large Labour majority the decision to continue the struggle is far from being a marginal one, easily influenced by a few dissident votes. At present the council seems no closer to crumbling than it has ever been, although there is grumbling on the right there is as yet no sign of any real split from the current line.

Kate Hamlyn

ISLINGTON: DETERMINED TO CONTINUE THE RESISTANCE!

Whatever else should be said about the local campaigns against rate-capping – and their outcome – they have already shown a level of unity and a breadth of support which would not at one time have seemed possible.

In Islington we have seen a large mobilisation of the community against Tory cuts and the threat of them, most notably from the voluntary organisations whose limited resources are under significant threat from all aspects of the government's attacks on local democracy. Representatives of local community organisations were particularly prominent amongst the crowds attending our special Council meeting on March 7th.

In Islington we have also had a mobilisation of tenants associations through our campaign against the cuts in the Housing Investment Programme. We have announced our determination to resist these cuts, sent a number of delegations one of which saw the relevant Tory Minister Ian Gow, and we have arranged for him to visit the borough. Local tenants meetings have also been held through the length and breadth of Islington and a Borough Housing Conference took place on March 25th.

The campaign has also been notable for the participation of the Council's trade unions. Since the long series of workplace meetings which finished earlier in the year, there have been frequent meetings between the Council leadership and joint trade union representatives which have discussed every phase of policy as it has developed. Outstanding arguments on social services restructuring and the staffing of neighbourhood offices have even been resolved in a general desire to concentrate on the defence of Council jobs and services. The Council's trade unions have organised much of the recent propaganda against ratecapping, and they mounted an effective lobby at the special Council meeting on March 28th. This is despite the fact that their role has been largely ignored in the local press and even in the Council's own newspaper!

This level of unity has also affected the Labour Party in the Borough and the Labour Group as well. Party members have perhaps not been conspicuous in some of the demonstrations, but most ward meetings have shown general support for the Council stand. As for the Group, even with its massive majority it has consistently pulled together – and disproved all the gleeful predictions from the SDP, the local press and the Standard that there would be a right wing group of a dozen siding with the SDP – and no Labour members in fact opposed a further refusal to set a rate on March 28th.

There was a rather lengthy argument in a special Group meeting held early on in the evening of that Council meeting. Though the discussion engendered a good deal of heat, it really revolved around a very small issue. This was whether we should mention in the resolution deffering the rate, the dates at which the issue would be further considered. It was a debate between those who wanted a formulation slightly safer from a legal point of view and those who wanted us to defer rate making without such qualifications. In the end a compromise set of words was adopted. The strength of the position was that all Group members – whatever their view – agreed to be bound by the majority decision and this resolve was carried forward into the Council Chamber.

At the time of writing over the Easter weekend, we have passed the first 'pain barrier' of April 1st. We are now launched into a new financial year without making a rate, and with most of the other rate-capped authorities still with us, including all but one of the London boroughs. Our aim at this time is to retain unity with them and with all the elements of our local communities to force back the Tories. Like Hackney we expect further writs from the SDP any day now, determined as they are to carry out the dirty work of the Tories. We also remain under continual pressure from some of our senior officers to engage in courses of action that are politically unacceptable.

It is hard to write about a political battle that unfolds almost every day, and where circumstances can radically change long before these words are even in print. However, many of us are determined to continue the resistance whatever the cost to ourselves, and the difficulties. There is already talk in our Group of mortgaging our future against any cuts at this stage in the event of no concessions of any kind coming from the Government. If other authorities outside Islington give in to this argument, it will be difficult for us to act in isolation.

Many of us feel strongly however that if we do not continue to resist this year, we will not simply sell out our future financial arrangements, but in the long term also the Council's jobs and the services it provides to the poor and disadvantaged. For the Tories it is only the beginning of massive cuts in public sector services. For us, we must show a determination at every stage to stop them in their tracks.

Councillor Alan Clinton
(Labour Chief Whip, Islington)

Tower Hamlets whip withdrawn from nine

Greeted by a huge demonstration of tenants, council workers and community groups on March 27th, Tower Hamlet's councillors arrived to set a rate that would cut services by £6.5 million and increase the rates by 10%. At a previous council meeting, rents had been increased by £2.00 per week.

The mood of the demonstration was angry. Angry because only four days previously did people know where cuts were to be made. The planned cuts will fall mainly in social services and housing as in past years.

Tower Hamlet's housing stock is among the worst in the country. A recent report by the Housing Director outlined the problems the borough faces: the greatest number of households above the fourth floor in England, the waiting list has 9,000 applicants and the cost of bed and breakfast accommodation for the homeless this year was £2¾ million. 7,000 unfit properties need to be cleared and the post-1960 blocks suffer from design and structural faults.

Given that catalogue of disaster, the Labour council were prepared to cut £1.5 million from repairs and maintenance. The homeless families were again the target.

This year things were different. The Labour Party has had enough of the Labour Group that just sits back and accepts Tory dictats. Nine councillors defied the whip and voted against making a rate.

Four days later at a Labour Group meeting, the whip was withdrawn from the nine councillors without any discussion with the local government committee. To date, the LGC has not discussed the issue.

The nine councillors are determined not to set a rate that will cut services or increase the rates.

The Liberals also voted against the budget on March 27th, but for very different reasons.

1) They agreed the council should stay within the government target of £64 million.

2) By creative accounting and juggling figures they could come up with a better deal.

Nothing they produced at council bore that out.

The only real alternative for Tower Hamlets is to join with other Labour councils and refuse to make a rate.

Cllr Therese Shanahan,
Tower Hamlets

TOWARDS THE CRUNCH IN CAMDEN

The first stage of the Camden campaign against rate-capping has been a success. On March 28th hundreds of trade unionists, party activists and Camden residents crowded into the Camden Centre to give their support to the Labour Group and to see it vote unanimously against the Tory motion to set the maximum rate-capped rate.

Camden's Borough Conference on March 30th reaffirmed its support for the 'no rate' strategy. The resolution on rate-capping, passed overwhelmingly by Conference, argued that the Labour Group should adopt an offensive stance and now must be prepared to take the struggle to the Government with other rate-capped authorities, rather than waiting to be picked off by the courts. Thus, the Council meeting on April 24th should resolve to refuse to set a rate until such time as Jenkin suspends the operation of the Rates Act. The Labour Group should also make clear its intention not to pay its PAYE contributions, its precept to the police and its interest repayments to the City. Borough Conference again stressed the importance of a united strategy of all rate-capped boroughs – thus a conference of North London rate-capped boroughs was called for April 20th.

The Labour Party in Camden stated its firm conviction that the strategy agreed at Borough Conference is the basis for not only continuing but winning the struggle against the Rates Act. We have not underestimated the political and practical difficulties of this strategy, nor the personal risks we are asking comrades on the Labour Group to take. But if forcing the Government to give Camden the funding it requires is our objective, a strategy of moving onto the offensive is the only viable one.



Brian James

Unclear

But it remains unclear if the Labour Group will refuse to set a rate at the Council meeting on April 24th. The Camden Labour Parties, and above all the Left in Camden, will have to exert maximum pressure on the Labour Group to ensure that it continues to follow agreed party policy. Other rate-capped boroughs have already rejected, or are in the process of backing off from, the 'no rate' strategy. A section of the Labour Group is now doubting if Camden, isolated from the other rate-capped boroughs, should continue to pursue its current course. Thus, it is critical that action must be taken to retain the unity of action of the rate-capped boroughs. Furthermore, up to nine members of the Labour Group have stated that they are unable to support a vote that would lead to illegality. These members of the Group must be urged to resign immediately and make way for comrades ready to support the strategy of the Camden Labour Parties. The Camden Local Government Committee has already set things in motion for a series of by-elections if and when they become necessary.

Town Hall trade unions

In the final analysis the strength of the anti-rate-capping is in the town hall trade unions. It is their industrial strength that can force the government to make significant concessions. It is therefore for the Labour Group to renew its efforts to convince the town hall workers that the Rates Act will have the effect of massive cuts in jobs and services. The government have openly declared that their objective is to cut Camden's expenditure in half over five years. It may be feasible for Camden to avoid crippling cuts this year if it was to set a rate-capped budget. However, in following years this option would not be open to it – compliance with the Rates Act would mean endless rounds of cuts. The unions must therefore be prepared to fight this year, from a position of relative strength, to ensure that the Rates Act is made inoperable, thereby forcing the government to reconsider its use in following years.

The Rates Act must be defeated. It is yet another weapon being used by Thatcherism to attack working class living standards. Its defeat is dependent on a strategy of taking the battle to the government, united and with the mass support of the town hall trade unions and the community. To reject this strategy would alter the balance of forces in favour of the government and must be seen as a defeat on this front.

Dave Joseph,
(Chair, Hampstead and Highgate CLP)

Sitting tight in Greenwich

A month on from March 7th we are still sitting tight in Greenwich. We did not levy a rate then and it has already been unanimously agreed by the Labour Group that when the Council next meets on April 24th we will continue not to levy a rate.

March 7th represented the culmination of extensive and concerted campaigning by the Council, the parties, the trade unions and community groups in the borough and demonstrated the wealth of support for our actions of non-compliance. It was the beginning of our united strategy of defying the Rates Act.

As with all the London lower tier rate-capped authorities we could not, however, have levied a rate in any event on March 7th because the level of the GLC and ILEA precepts were not known that night.

The position at our Council meeting on April 24th will be different now that the level of those precepts is known. The strength of our resolve will be seriously tested and will hold.

On March 7th we received additional advice that we should consider deferring the making of a rate because the Council had been granted leave to start an action for judicial review against Patrick Jenkin. The action asks for a declaration that the decision of the Secretary of State to make the Rates Limitation Order is unlawful and ultra vires and should be quashed. It asks in the alternative for a declaration that the parts of the order which apply to Greenwich are unlawful and ultra vires and should be quahsed.

We now know that our case will not be heard until June 12th. It may be that we will continue to receive legal advice to delay considering making a rate until the outcome of our action is known, but this is not certain and depends to some extent on judgements given in similar cases.

Waiting game

We are in a position of playing a waiting game. Not just because of any legal action, but because the joint campaign has so far not bitten in the way we would like. We are receiving very little press interest, unlike Liverpool last year, and Patrick Jenkin is steadfastly refusing to take any notice of us collectively in the hope that we will all lose our nerve and collapse.

"I see no purpose in a further meeting with the ad hoc and unpresentative group led by Councillor Blunkett. Nearly half of that group have now complied with the law and set rates or precepts. I look to the remainder to follow this example." (Patrick Jenkin, House of Commons, Thursday March 14th, 1985).

Greenwich has the resolve and determination in the Labour Group, in the trade unions and within the community at large to wait. We have taken steps to try to ensure that we can hold out financially for as long as possible and to ensure that people, specifically housing benefit recipients, will not be adversely affected by our decisions not to levy a rate so far.



Greenwich Labour Councillors celebrate not setting a rate on March 7th.

Legal advice

The example of Greenwich illustrates the very different position each of the Authorities who did not levy a rate is in, largely based on the creativity and quality of the legal advice received over the last year. It is essential that despite this those of us who are strong and who can hold out continue to identify common action that we can take in order to preserve the unity we have already shown. We must escalate non-compliance to force Jenkin to negotiate with us sooner rather than later.

It is sad, but it was inevitable, that some authorities would not be able to stay in the fight, either because of unhelpful legal advice or because the determination to fight was not strong enough in their Labour Groups.

Those of us who are strong and who are still fighting are now carrying the additional burden and responsibility of fighting other authorities' battles for them by continuing to challenge the principle of the Rates Act and targets and penalties. We are also fighting for those authorities who will be caught by the Rates Act next year and the year after if we don't win.

Potential illegality

The issue of potential illegality has got to be faced and must be faced sooner rather than later. We have to demonstrate that we are prepared to risk surcharge and illegality if this is an essential step along the road to victory. Councillors who cannot face this for whatever reason must be honest and must understand that resigning now is the only honourable course of action if they are not to prevent the rest of us from carrying party policy into effect and smashing the Rates Act. Local Labour Parties have a vital role to play in ensuring accountability in this respect.

I want to get on with the fight, secure in the knowledge that the comrades fighting with me are prepared to go as far as necessary. I am not anxious to hand over my house to Mrs Thatcher or to lose my qualification as a Barrister, nor to be a martyr, but I am prepared to do so to ensure victory. I, and others like me, need to know that all councillors left in the struggle are prepared to do likewise.

Claer Lloyd-Jones
(Chair of Labour Group,
London Borough of Greenwich)

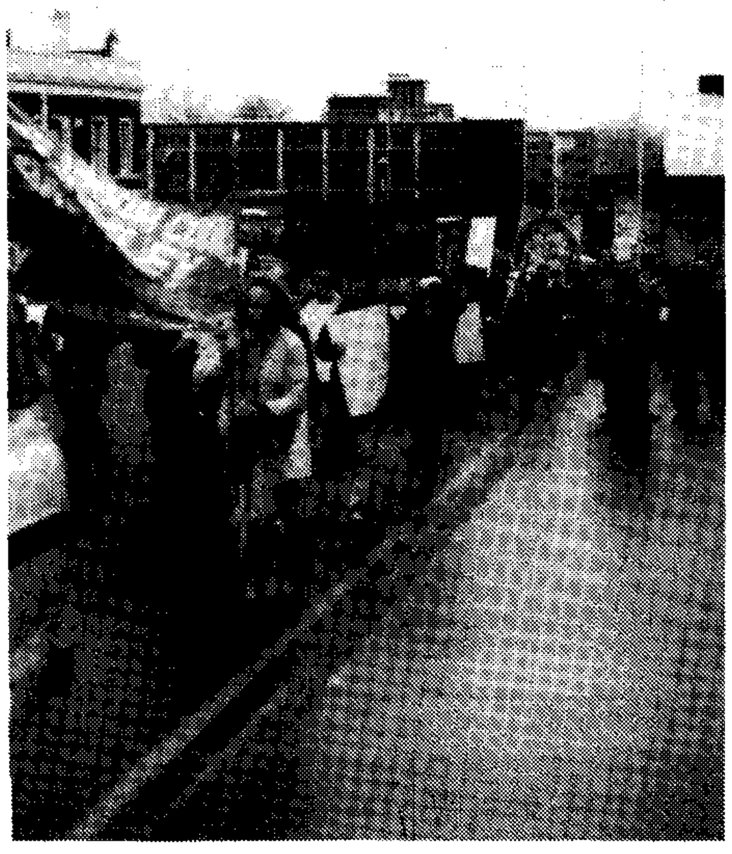
Defend the 'Bromley Ten'

ON March 2nd 1985 in Bromley High Street in Kent, ten people were arrested on a charge of 'wilful obstruction' whilst collecting food and money for the striking miners and their families, as they had done throughout the strike.

There were at least eighteen people on the collection that morning but only ten were arrested. The arresting officers, who appeared to be from an Instant Response Unit, were physically aggressive towards a woman on the collection and were clearly acting on orders from above.

The 'Bromley Ten' were taken to Bromley police station where their names and addresses were taken. Once the formalities were out of the way, the police duped them into going into a tiny cell, designed perhaps for a maximum of four people, and the door was then closed and locked behind them. For a considerable period of time, the ten men and women were held captive in this one small, badly-ventilated cell which rapidly became claustrophobic. Pleas for assistance from within the cell were met by the response from police officers that they were "busy". Finally, a sympathetic solicitor secured their release in the face of deliberate police indolence in checking the names and addresses of the ten.

On Saturday March 30th, supporters of the 'Bromley Ten', including miners and their wives from the Kent coalfield, marched through Tory Bromley's town centre, led by the 'Bromley Ten' themselves, to demonstrate against political trials, the serious criminalisation of political activity which will result from this case and the increasing danger of a police state.



The case was heard on Wednesday April 3rd at Bromley Magistrates Court but the 'Bromley Ten' were not alone in facing the Tory judiciary and were supported by a 60-strong vociferous lobby of the court. Many of these supporters packed the public gallery to hear the case which was remanded until May 7th.

We are now planning a public meeting for the end of April, having secured some local press interest in the case, and are organising for a bigger and noiser lobby of the court on Tuesday May 7th at 9.15 a.m. Ideally we would like to see at least 200 people protesting about this attack on the right to free speech and political activity.

The right to take political action, especially action which visibly opposes the Tories and the system they so ably represent, is at stake in this case.

Further travel details and details of where the court is in the town can be obtained from Mike Darcy on 466 1297.

Donations to the defence fund — please ring the above number. We badly need money to put up a decent defence. Please support us.

The South London Women's Hospital — evicted but the struggle goes on!

Lousie Christian,
Streatham CLP

At about 4 a.m. on the morning of Wednesday March 27th, up to 50 women who had barricaded themselves into the South London Women's Hospital were forcibly and violently evicted by male police officers. A few policewomen stood by for show. Many of the women went up onto the roof and could be seen being dragged down from there silhouetted against the sky. Two women were arrested after scuffles broke out between women outside the hospital and male police officers. One of the arrested women, who is black, was dragged along the ground by a scarf tied round her neck and was bleeding from one of her legs.

Unusually among the many local residents who supported the campaign against the hospital's closure, I was woken up by someone banging on my door and told of the eviction. Most people did not find out till afterwards. I went along to lend support but was powerless in trying to contact more people in the time available. The brave women in the occupation were on their own. The next day, *all* the press coverage was entirely dominated by the police version of events given in a police press conference in the morning. The police stated that the eviction was carried out entirely by policewomen. As one of those who was there, I know this to be wholly wrong.

I did not notice the previous evening that my telephone had been entirely silent. I first realised there was something wrong with it after I returned home at 8 a.m. after helping the arrested women in the police station. A friend who rang me got a number unobtainable signal and complained to the operator who then put her through. Later I discovered that numerous people had rung me during the previous evening and got unobtainable signals. Inquiries have since established that three other members of Streatham Labour Party, all known supporters of the hospital's campaign, all had their phones put out of order that night. One of them, Jane Drury, who also lives near the hospital, was subjected to police surveillance outside her house because women from the hospital were visiting her.

For the whole week of the eviction, police officers with note books were seen loitering outside her front door and her phone was either out of order or subjected to continual interference.

Complaints have been made in Parliament by Alf Dubbs, but ambiguous replies have been received from the Home Office and the police.

The eviction had other local repercussions. Some 15 year old schoolgirls from a local school went to demonstrate outside the hospital the morning after the eviction and were arrested. They were held in police cells in Kennington Police Station for up to three hours without their parents or the school being told, despite requests by them to the police to do so.

The authorities must be really frightened of the real anger of women that their hospital is closing for them to go to such lengths in staging a secret eviction in the middle of the night. But we will not stop our campaign. The South London Women's Hospital was the last hospital in the whole country to provide general medical services for women by women. It is a scandal and a tragedy that its closure will mean women no longer have the right to be treated by all women staff.

LONDON LABOUR PARTY — *LEAD*, NOT FOLLOW BLINDLY!

Recriminations are still the order of the day in the wake of the failure of the GLC and ILEA to follow party policy and refuse to set a rate, but most party activists find themselves left bored and indifferent by all the detailed accounts of what Livingstone said to McDonnell on a particular date or (worse) what McDonnell wrote to Livingstone in a private letter six months ago.

The real problem is not "betrayal" or "treachery" by the new left realists; it's the extent to which we, all of us, have allowed the politics we represent to become concentrated in the activities and beliefs of a few left heroes – white male heroes at that. If we stand for greater democratisation of the Party, if we stand for giving power to women and black people, then the Regional Party itself must assume far more collective responsibility and power. The response to the current crisis should not be to switch allegiance from one left wing Messiah to another but to strengthen the mechanisms for determining and controlling the implementation of regional policy and to turn the Party into a body with a real collective public profile.

Eight additional women

At long last the composition of the Regional Executive is such that this is a real possibility. In particular the arrival of eight additional women elected by a rule change to represent the women's organisation has strengthened both women's and left representation. Mildred Gordon and I have been newly elected joint Chairs of the Policy Committee, arguably the most important sub-committee of the Regional Executive Committee (the principle of having joint Chairs was in itself a victory). At the first full meeting of the Policy Committee we set to work to map out a programme of action for the Party for the coming year. We took the unprecedented step of reviewing proposed action by the general secretary on each and every resolution passed at the Annual Meeting; we have called on all sub-committees to decide on a programme for the coming year (rather than just reacting to business) and we have asked to Regional EC to give us the specific power to monitor the implementation of all resolutions.

We are determined that there will be real activity on certain crucial issues. We will ensure that a resolution on gay and lesbian rights, shelved since 1983, is implemented and a working party to formulate policy is set up. Despite interference from the NEC (see below) we will implement the important resolution committing us to wide ranging consultation on Tony Benn's/Ernie Robert's Private Member's Bill providing for the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland. We believe that a campaign based on a policy of withdrawal would win the Party massive electoral support.

Rate-capping

After the failure of the GLC and the ILEA to follow Party policy on opposing rate-capping we know that the hard work being done in the boroughs by Party and Union activists deserves our every support. We were not able to implement an emergency resolution calling for a conference on rate-capping to be convened at the end of March but we have resolved to call a special Annual Meeting at the beginning of July which will have full policy-making powers to determine what will happen next in the anti-rate-capping campaign. We will not leave defiant Labour Groups isolated; we will do our utmost to swing the Regional Party into action with a full campaigning and policy-making role.

The task we have set ourselves will not be easy. The Regional Party has its own special tradition of bureaucratic inaction which can totally engulf the unsuspecting. And the biggest problem of all is the position of the General Secretary and other paid staff who are not accountable to us at all but to the NEC. Clouds looming on the horizon include a letter from the National Agent, David Hughes, stating that he has referred the resolution on Northern Ireland to the NEC "to prevent its implementation" and directing the staff not to follow our instructions in carrying it out. The staff, who are anyway overworked because they double up as national organisers will understandably do as he says. At our first Policy Committee meeting we passed a resolution condemning his action but we need to do more if we are to be effective. It is of course absurd that the London Regional Party should have no independent funding to employ its own staff. We urgently need ideas, resolutions, fundraising action to help solve this problem in the long term.

More immediately we will have to do the work to implement the resolution ourselves if the officials won't do it. We need input advice help and support from all members to turn the London Labour Party into a forum for action against the government, not a safe refuge for left superstars. Help us by getting in contact with and making accountable your CLP or Union section reps on the Regional EC, pass resolutions urging *action* and let us know about them as well as sending them to Regional Office. Help us make the Regional Party a resource for you and your organisation. Let's go forward together!

Louise Christian,
(Joint Chair of the Policy Committee, Greater London Labour Party, in a personal capacity)

London Letters

Bryn Davies replies to Keith Lichman

Dear Editor,
In the world of Keith Lichman the abolition of Grammar Schools would have been a cut in education. He is, of course, entitled to be reactionary in his views, as again is clearly shown in your April issue, where he says that, in current circumstances, he is against all educational innovation. What he should not do is to pretend that his arguments in support of sixth forms have anything to do with improving educational opportunities for young people, or even a rational strategy to oppose cuts.

What the ILEA is trying to do through the system of Tertiary Education Boards is to strengthen the present system with schools and FE colleges, while increasing the real opportunities for choice by sixteen year olds. In doing so we are carrying out the commitment in paragraph 16.2 of the manifesto on which we were elected, which commits the ILEA to establish such a structure with the aim of greater co-ordination. To suggest that schools can continue to educate those over 16 without such co-ordination is to disregard the interests of young people. If the system fails then, in my view, the only alternative is a single comprehensive system of Tertiary Colleges.
Yours faithfully,

Bryn Davies
GLC/ILEA Member for Lambeth, Vauxhall

The case for tertiary colleges

Dear Briefing,
The rejection of the SEA's motion on tertiary colleges on the grounds it was 'too extreme' is indeed sad but it means London Labour Party is opposed to comprehensive education post-sixteen. At the moment we have a divided system between F.E. colleges and VI form and academic and vocational education. Small VI forms apart from offering an inadequate range of courses are being staffed at the expense of the 11-16 students and the opponents of tertiary colleges in the educational world are the Conservative Party, Sir Keith Joseph and the London Labour Party.

Tertiary colleges are supported by the national Conference of the Labour Party and are being introduced throughout the country. Wherever they are, the staying-on rate at sixten in full-time education rises dramatically, especially amongst working-class students.

It is perfectly possible to have a system where teachers work in both 11-16 schools and the tertiary college but to defend the present divided post-16 system is to be against comprehensive education and to support a system which limits opportunities.

In a falling rolls situation the existence of VI forms undermines comprehensive education at eleven as parents choose which schools has the largest VI form. In the end some 11-16 schools and some 11-18 schools emerge in the same area and no amount of resources can prevent this.

ILTA are quite right to oppose cuts and to fight for their members' interests. What is sad is that they have genuinely misunderstood the argument about tertiary colleges. Opponents of their development are on the right and belong to the reactionary wing of education.
Yours sincerely,

Graham Lane
General Secretary, SEA

No witch-hunt at the GLC

Hornsey and Wood Green Labour Party does not support its GLC councillor Mike Ward in his attempt to replace John McDonnell as Deputy Leader of the council. This was the decision of the March GC following a debate on a resolution condemning Wards role in the GLC precept setting fiasco.

The resolution, carried by a two thirds majority, was important because it raised the question of the accountability of councillors to their local parties, reiterated our commitment to a no-rate strategy, and demonstrated our opposition to any witch-hunt of the left on the GLC.



Mike Ward supporting legal rate, March 10th — John Chapman

Direct opposition

On March 4th Mike Ward moved at a meeting of the GLC Labour Group that the GLC should set a maximum precept based on the budget drawn up by the head of the councils Programme Office. This was a move in direct opposition to the policy of the Hornsey and Wood Green Labour Party which had, just two weeks earlier, carried a resolution specifically instructing its GLC councillors to support existing party policy and to vote against the setting of a precept at the next Group meeting. Ward met with party officers on March 6th to explain his actions but at no time prior to the meeting on the 4th did he indicate his unwillingness to follow party policy to any party meeting or to party officers. In fact in November the party discussed, at a GC meeting, the possibility of councillors on both Haringey council and the GLC not following party policy. At that meeting Ward expressed the view that these councillors could be pressured by lobbying by the Party and the Community.

The rights and wrongs of what happened in the GLC council chamber on March 10th is not an issue here. The point is that Ward should have voted for the no precept position in the Group. The so called 'growth budget' presented to the group was adopted by a majority of just six and, with the possibility of the Tories abstaining in council, a no precept vote could have been a real possibility. Ward's role in the group was therefore crucial.

At the March GC Ward outlined his reasons for adopting his position. Firstly, a precept could be set without making any cuts in jobs and services. Secondly, had the GLC not set a precept by March 10th the Government would have introduced legislation compelling all authorities to set a rate by a specific date and thus weaken their ability to delay the setting of a rate. Thirdly, David Blunkett and the major Public sector Trade Unions supported the setting of a precept. These reasons all appear to be based on a view that the no precept strategy was not applicable to the upper tier authorities. If Ward holds this view it is unlikely that it was formed overnight. He therefore had plenty of time to discuss it with the party. Hornsey and Wood Green Labour Party have always expected its Councillors to follow party policy and it was important to reiterate this at this time as we are about to select members for the Borough election panel.

Mere posturing

Was the strategy of not fixing a rate applicable to the GLC? We say that it was. A confrontation with the Government can only succeed if there is a willingness to break the law. If there is not then the Government will not feel any need to negotiate. In which case the existence of a date by which a precept must be set is a red herring. We are fighting for the restoration of rate support grant and against the ratecapping legislation. These would be two major reversals for the Government which can not be won by mere posturing. For several months now the GLC had been posturing, claiming that compliance with ratecapping would leads to massive cuts. The councillors then turned around and said that cuts need not be made, thus giving the impression of being either ill informed or completely inept.

Setting a precept weakened the fight against ratecapping and would have done so regardless of the level of the actual precept set. The GLC demonstrated to the Government that there was no need to negotiate with the ratecapped authorities as they would set a rate as soon as they were informed that they were in conflict with the law. Furthermore the Group have implicitly accepted abolition. Both the precept set and the defeated maximum precept are based on muddling through until abolition. The Group have shown that they are unwilling to stand up and fight on the abolition issue. Whilst arguing that they are defending jobs and services in 1985, the Group have voted for cuts in jobs and services in 1986.

The resolution condemning Ward was carried not because the party thought that recrimination was a worthwhile thing to endulge in, but as a means of reiterating our stance on ratecapping and restating our views on accountability. Mike Ward has stated that he deplored the personal attacks on individual members of the council. He should now refrain from becoming involved in any witch-hunt of the left on the council and withdraw his nomination for Deputy Leader.

Haringey Briefing Group

Unsubstantial smear

Dear Briefing,
I would like to make two points in reply to Martin McGrath's letter in the April Briefing, which paints Terry Connolly as a 'windbag militant', etc., etc.,:

1. It is precisely through the commitment of 'hardworking conscientious party workers' that the Labour Party stands any chance of regaining some credibility in Tower Hamlets. If the retirement of Ian Mikardo and the much longed-for future political demise of Peter Shore, together with the serious political decline of the Borough Council's ruling Old Guard are not to leave a dangerous vacuum, then the Left must also think of putting forward activist comrades for the power *and responsibility* of political office. I would suggest that more and more people are recognising that comrades who do not treat office as an alternative to political campaigning should not simply be dismissed as 'careerists' along with the rest.

2. Who on earth benefits from the kind of unsubstantiated smear on personal integrity contained in Martin McGrath's letter? I do wonder when we all as a movement will grow up beyond the 'Private Eye' stage to be able to debate issues and different standpoints on a serious and *political* basis.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Pate
Member, Bow and Poplar CLP

Dear Briefing,
Richard Collyer's letter in the March Briefing only emphasises my point about the irrational quality of so much political violence. No ruling clique will voluntarily give up its power, yet non-violent action, if massive and persistent enough, can win substantial gains. Surely, the Indian Independence and American Civil Rights movements prove this. The amount of violence used produces a directly related amount of division, alienation, and suffering by oppressed and supposed oppressors alike.

The S.L.F. manifesto quoted by Comrade Collyer is terrifying, in both its self-righteous tone and its murderous intent. I would not want to decide who should be punished for the oppression, which exists in many complex contemporary situations. Comrade Collyer, like his mentors the S.L.F., has no qualms about compiling the "hit list" of oppressors ripe for revolutionary retribution. Similarly, the IRA are committed to killing "the Brits". The eloquent exponents of Republicanism, Adams, Devlin, etc., are drowned by bomb blasts and the noise of bullet fire. Every dead "Brit" is another publicity coup for the British and their Irish allies North and South. Educate, agitate, organise; this is the socialist method, not glorifying in slaughter, or justifying it with revolutionary moralising.

Yours fraternally,

Jon Baston

Two open letters to Brent East delegates

"WHY SELECTION MUST START AGAIN"

In April 1982 London Labour Briefing carried a front page entitled 'Let's Run London *Our* Way'. In a ringing declaration over 100 London Labour candidates argued "where threats of legal action, including surcharges, are made, we announce in advance that we will not tolerate those as reasons for abandoning our manifesto commitments".

This firm declaration of intent to defend working class Londoners from Tory attacks has been adhered to by most of the candidates subsequently elected to local authorities. This is a proud record for the left in London – perhaps Briefing's finest achievement to date.

Only seven names on the 1982 declaration stand out – those of the GLC councillors who voted for the rate-capped GLC budget defeated on March 10th. It is this act of betrayal of Briefing's declaration, of fellow Labour councillors facing surcharge and above all of London Labour Party policy that has splintered the unity of the left in Brent East CLP and throughout London. Ken Livingstone deliberately decided to force this split and took a decisive step towards the Kinnock/Cunningham camp.

Brent East CLP, hitherto united behind Livingstone's Parliamentary candidature, suddenly found itself supporting the architect of a defeat for the whole of Briefing's local government strategy. Livingstone's betrayal was a massive boost to Thatcher and to the right in the Party. It is our belief that Livingstone's actions will lead to more and greater Tory attacks on local expenditure. To "reward" Livingstone with a safe parliamentary seat would be therefore a grave mistake.

It gives us no pleasure to write this. For we have been among the staunchest supporters of Ken throughout the selection saga in Brent East, and until March 10th we opposed all attempts to find an alternative candidate.

But those open letters to Brent East members are arguments for halting the Parliamentary selection due on April 28th. There are many comrades who believe Ken's standing in the Irish community, his previous record at the GLC and other factors outweigh his "mistake" on rate-capping. Our view is that to patronise the working class of Brent East – the majority of whom are suffering at the hands of a Tory/Liberal rate-capping Council – by pretending they can't understand what Livingstone did on March 10th would be a gross insult. Far from being a single mistake, Livingstone's vote put his own Parliamentary career above the interests of working class Londoners.

Ken Livingstone can no longer be trusted to fight for socialist policies in the teeth of Tory (and Labour right) opposition. He no longer deserves to be MP for Brent East. We urge all delegates – vote to stop the selection on April 28th and let us openly discuss finding a candidate worthy of our Party.

Graham Durham,
Cricklewood Branch,
Dave Statham,
Treasurer, Brent East CLP

We are striving in this article not to launch personal attacks on individuals but to deal with what the debacle of the GLC's failure to stand firm on rate-capping has revealed about Ken Livingstone and the implications this has for reselection on Brent East.

Ken's actions have been well-documented already. His failure to abide by Greater London Labour Party policy shows that he is only prepared to accept a mandate when it suits him and his career. This has serious implications for his future accountability. Would he stand by policies on Northern Ireland, gays and lesbians and positive action for women and ethnic minorities, if the going got tough?

Those who still support him argue that Ken has always stood firm on these policies yet the very fact that he is after a safe seat, as a white, heterosexual, able-bodied male, places a big question mark over his commitment to positive action. When questioned about this his answers have been. to say the least, unsatisfactory. Furthermore, until recently, commitment to fighting rate-capping would have been top of that list. If he's prepared to back down over such an important issue, which affects not only the whole campaign against government legislation and the morale of workers and councillors in the rate-capped authorities, but will also have terrible repercussions in the voluntary sector and on millions of people's lives – can he be trusted to adhere to agreed policies which the Left have fought for over many years?



John Chapman

Ken's Kingdom

That Brent East has been earmarked for many years as Ken's Kingdom is no secret. But his arrogance in assuming that his unprincipled actions on March 10th will go unchallenged is terrifying in its implications. Brent East has fought long and hard to rid itself of an MP who does not regard himself as accountable to the CLP and its policies. Many people who still support Ken refuse to face up to the fact that he has, before he has even secured the candidature, reneged on a major issue. The prevailing attitude at this stage is that he is "the best of a poor bunch", and that once elected the GMC will be able to control him. This is naive given the speed with which the axe fell on the ten who stuck by party policy. It is not an exaggeration to say there have been purges at County Hall. The newly-elected Policy and Resources Committee effectively takes financial control away from John McDonnell and Ken finds himself with a new line-up of supporters including right-winger Barrie Stead and excluding Valerie Wise, one of Ken's staunchest allies (what price positive action?!). Those who supported Party policy have been excluded from membership of the Policy and Resources Committee, which has central control over all GLC expenditure and policies. It is fully expected that at the Labour Group AGM those same comrades will more than likely be removed

"Nothing less than a purge"

The re-alignment of political control at County Hall is now well underway. Amid statements at the GLC Labour Group from Ken Livingstone, such as: "No Member is being penalised for the way they voted in the budget debate," the Deputy Leader of the GLC, John McDonnell, was effectively rendered powerless and the four nominees of "the County Hall Ten" (i.e. those who voted against any legal precept at the Budget Meeting) were all defeated in the ballot for the new all-powerful Policy and Resources Committee. Given the final composition of that Committee, it is difficult to disagree with Deirdre Wood's statement: "This amounts to nothing less than a purge."

The most dubious aspect of the whole affair has been the establishment of this new P&R Committee. Of course, those Boroughs still not fixing a rate have all set up similar committees of a small number of leading Councillors (plus Leader's advisory groups, including Party members, in some cases), because it is essential that there is some body which can react swiftly when writs are flying or when officers are exerting heavy pressure to give in to the DoE line — or indeed when Councillors are thrown into panic by yet another round of rumours.

But what seems to have been overlooked in the GLC's case is that a majority of the Labour Group decided not to support any illegal act and, whatever view you have of the events of the Budget Meeting, that policy was in effect carried in the Council Chamber. In that case, why establish a committee specifically designed to conduct the affairs of an authority acting illegally? The answer must be that the 12-member P&R Committee assumes all the decision-making powers, at the highest level, of the Council and removes financial control from the Finance and General Purposes Committee (chaired by John McDonnell).

The method involved in establishing this new committee must also not be overlooked. The P&R Committee was agreed as Point 3 of a nine-point plan proposed by Ken to the pre-Budget Meeting Group meeting on 4th March. However the illegal act of not fixing a rate was Point 4 of the motion! Logic surely dictates that you agree the policy first and establish the structure to implement it after. The Labour Group, however, was asked to agree the structure and then, lo and behold (!), the policy was amended! Forget "Streamlining the Cities" — Jenkin could do with taking lessons from Ken's "Streamlining the GLC".

Also, as Bryn Davies suggested, it would have seemed sensible when setting up the P&R Committee to make the Leader of the GLC the Committee Chair and the Chair of the Finance & General Purposes the Vice-chair, regardless of who holds those positions. However the need to exact retribution from The Ten for following GLLP Policy was so strong that the Labour Group could not even cope with the prospect of McDonnell as P&R Vice-chair for six weeks (i.e. until the Group AGM, when he could be replaced as Chair of Finance and General Purposes).

The real irony of the situation is that these manoeuvres (isolating The Ten, concentrating power in P&R) were carried out perfectly until it came to the voting for the composition of the P&R Committee itself. The bargaining strength of the right at County Hall is now such that Ken Livingstone and friends included two right-wingers (Tom McBrearty and Simon Turney) on their slate of seven (P&R comprises 7 Labour, 4 Tory and 1 Alliance). And the real strength of the right was revealed when, not only were the four left candidates (Boateng, Hammond, McDonnell, Wood) eliminated in the first four ballots but even Valerie Wise was unable to secure a place — being defeated by yet another right candidate: Barrie Stead.

It is also a sad reflection on the Group that, after four years of Labour control of County Hall, the new centre/left and right coalition were prepared to elect an all-male, all-white membership of the P&R Committee. (Note: of the four candidates fielded by The Ten, two were women and one was the GLC's only black councillor).

As six out of the seven Labour members (Livingstone, MacKay, McBrearty, Carr, Ward, Turney) were on Ken's slate, the P&R Committee really ought to be almost ideally suited to Ken's new realignment of forces at County Hall. But if this is the case, why was he unable, at his first appearance for many months at the Association of London Authorities Labour Group, to guarantee a commitment from the GLC Labour Group to deliver help to the Boroughs? Because, as Ken said, there is now a majority for "legality" (meaning against opposing rate-capping) on the P&R Committee. And why is there such a majority? Because Ken and the centre/left fielded a slate and voted to it — thereby ensuring the exclusion of any of The Ten. Another nifty Livingstone double-shuffle!

The problem, Ken, is that you appear to have not even the remotest interest in helping or supporting the Boroughs, as evidenced by the flood of resolutions from CLPs in rate-capped Boroughs, condemning not the GLC's collapse, which was expected, but the way in which it was engineered. Still, at least if the GLC is abolished, you can always walk away from the effects of rate-capping and into the House of Commons. But what about those of us left in the Boroughs.

Kevin Veness
(Association of London Local Government Committees)

from the key positions they hold.

Align with centre and right

By his actions to date Ken leaves himself with no choice but to align himself with the centre and right. What could this mean for Brent East?

Those who feel they currently occupy the same political space as Ken Livingstone should bear in mind his recent behaviour. During the week leading up to the budget-making he convened a press conference and gave press briefings which attacked the left describing them as "the loony left" and their actions as "posing and posturing". On a personal level John McDonnell was accused of "systematically lying to the Council, the Labour Group and to the Party Conference". Is this not horribly familiar, recalling actions our current MP has taken with regard to the left in Brent East? Surely this is one of the reasons we have been so anxious to reselect?

To those who think Ken can be trusted, we say think again. The only principled thing Brent East delegates can do is vote not to move to a ballot at our selection conference. That would leave us free to have a fair and open reselection to which we could invite all those potential left candidates who wouldn t stand this time because Brent East was seen as Ken's Kingdom.

Deborah Knight,
Rosemary Deane,
(Brent East CLP in personal capacity).

ILEA: Andy Harris replies

Dear Briefing,
I am surprised that Briefing printed Richard Reiser's comment on the ILEA Budget decision as if it were a factual account and that no accurate article to "balance" it was felt necessary.

Apart from the distortions and sleights of hand contained in the article I find it strange that an obviously right-wing perspective is given so much prominence by Briefing.

Let's examine Mr Reiser's stance more closely — firstly the article comes from an individual who refuses to join the Labour Party and is ambivalent about the affiliation of the NUT to the Labour Party. A position that absents itself from the real struggle. This alone should make comrades question his intentions.

It is a conservative position for it argues for the maintenance of school sixth forms, for young people wasting time walking between schools as a result of consortium arrangements. It argues against comprehensive tertiary colleges, and therefore denies young inner Londoners the full range of opportunities that can only be properly made available in such colleges. It does this for the sectional interests of school teachers in the N.U.T. because tertiary college teachers may be likely to joint NATFHE Richard Reiser will drive them there anyway.

He also fantasizes that comprehensive education can exist in ridiculously tiny schools.

Mr Reiser conjures the illusion that ILEA has made cuts in the last two years when the Budget for 1983/4 grew in *real terms* by 1.6% and for 1984/5 grew by 0.9%. School teachers jobs have been protected over that two year period and we increased supply cover by 300 extra teachers last year.

Richard Reiser's article argued that if a "no rate" position on the ILEA could not be won then the officer's Budget that included £24m of cuts should be allowed by default to be the fallback position. A "no rate" position could have been won on the ILEA if the GLC public row had not destabilised the confidence of some members. Those of us who voted for the Alex MacKay amendment did so because it eliminated the £24m of cuts by raiding the building fund and seeking more money from the GLC. Many of us then voted not to make a rate — although you wouldn't have known this from Mr Reiser's article! What he is arguing for is that if you couldn't win "no rate" then let's leave ourselves with the worst possible fall back where real people lose real jobs. How do you explain that to your union members? Perhaps it is this kind of logic that causes his members to vote him out of office as a secretary of the Inner London Teachers Association.
Richard Reiser's time as ILTA secretary seemed to be spent entirely on trying to discredit the Labour ILEA and sour the relationship between teachers and the ILEA. The Tory Government and its policies were an unfortunate irritant that was not to be allowed to get in the way of his attacks and those of Keith Lichman, verging on the misogynistic, against Frances Morrell and the Authority she leads. He wanted to bargain with ILEA members before he'd even his advise his members to implement anti-racist and anti-sexist policies.

At a time when "74% say what the fuck's going on?"Briefing has a responsibility to commission articles on the ILEA from Labour Party members who yes may be critical in their support. You choose conservatives like Mr Reiser whose purpose is to destroy the Labour Party and the Labour ILEA using the same methods as the Fleet Street Press.

The ILEA is attempting to draw closer to the teachers in a spirit of renewed co-operation. We fully support their legitimate grievance with the Government and we are offering to end compulsory redeployment in line with the change in the London Labour Party's policy.

Those now in positions of leadership in ILTA are Labour Party members and we should be able to proceed with mutual understanding if not total agreement.

Briefing would do well to reflect this rather than choose off-beat sources for its commentaries.

WHY THE LEFT MUST TAKE GLEB SERIOUSLY

by Steve Marks

(Steve Marks works for the GLEB but is writing in a personal capacity.)

Tory strategy could lead to death by slow bleeding, of the most advanced practical experiment in local socialist planning yet seen in Britain. In its first two full years of life, the Greater London Enterprise Board has already

★ *proved Lawsonism wrong in practice by creating or saving 3,500 jobs at less than the costs of leaving workers on the dole*

★ *proved jobs can be created while preserving union organisation and workers' rights, and while extending equal opportunities for women and black people*

★ *shown that new technology can create jobs in other ways than by destroying existing skills*

★ *pioneered new forms of public ownership and industrial democracy, to show that enterprise doesn't have to be private*

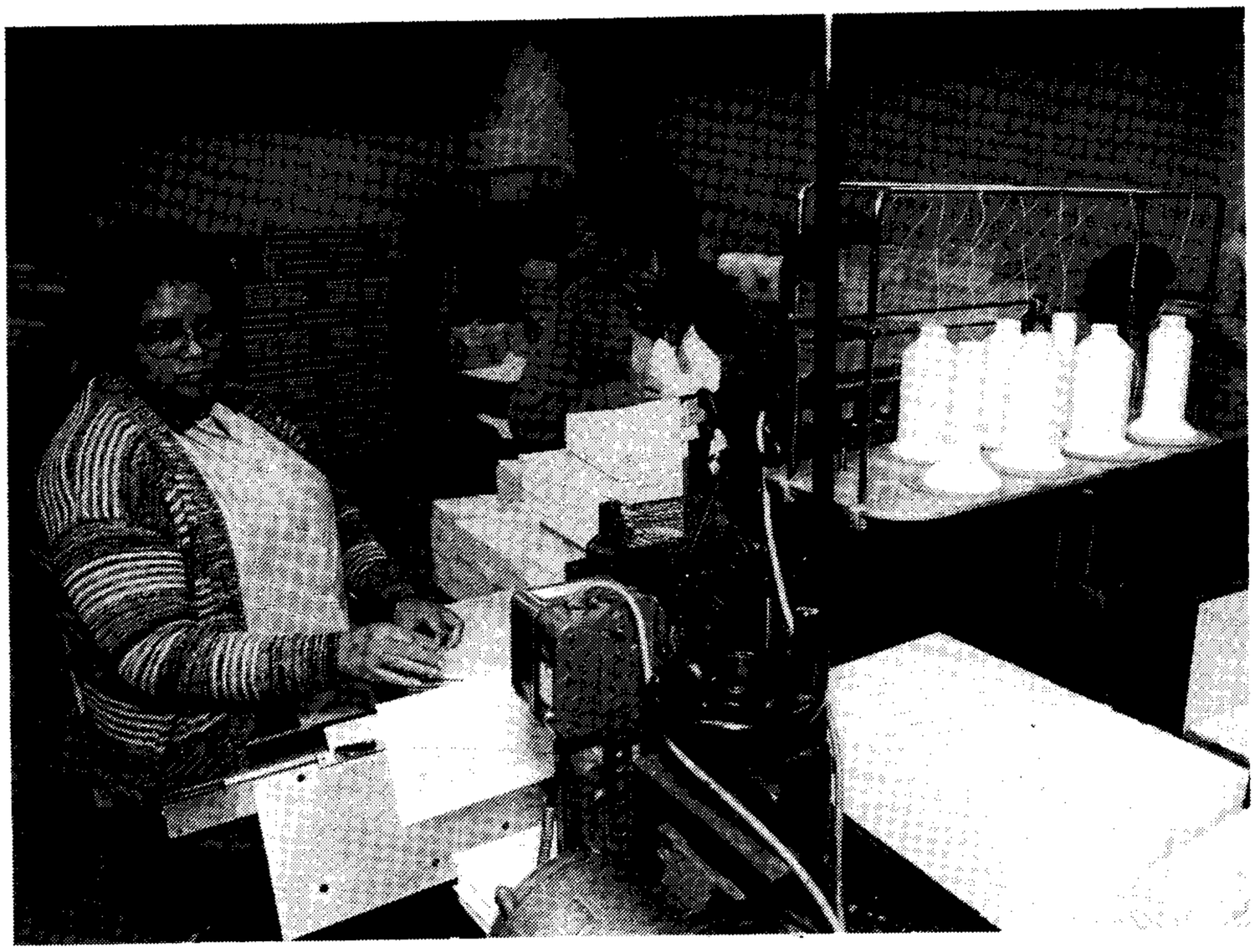
If all these points, and what follows from them, could sink into mass consciousness, Thatcherism and monetarism would be well on the way to being buried.

But at the same time, this experiment or aspects of it, have been praised, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, by such motley elements as Shirley Williams, the Economist and the Daily Telegraph.

Speeches by Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley have cited local authority enterprise boards, including GLEB, as examples of a new style of Labour economic policy that would not just supplement large-scale public ownership and central planning, but make it possible to dispense with them.

And even the Tory Government, while taking now measures to end GLEB, have also carefully avoided the suggestion that it would necessarily come to an end in the event of GLC abolition.

So who is kidding who?



Melanie Freud

Standard Bookbinding, the last London bookbinding company, now owned jointly by its workers and GLEB.

Laboratory of exemplary experiments

The answer, in brief, is that given its limited resources, the GLEB can do little other than function as a laboratory of 'exemplary' experiments. Whatever the context in which the GLC's economic policy intends them to be set, its experiments can be — and are — made use of by observers from a wide range of differing political positions.

All the more reason, therefore, for the left to learn the socialist lessons, both positive and negative, from the GLEB experience, and to make sure that the centre and centre-right does not appropriate its experience — either at the level of propaganda or in practice.

The GLC's original economic strategy was summed up in the slogan 'Restructuring for Labour': a package starting from the assessment of unmet needs by Lucas-type workers' plans providing a workplace and community-based input into a new 'popular planning' approach to economic targeting.

An interventionist enterprise board could begin to implement the plan using public investment funds, in accordance with sector strategies worked out with the labour movement. Public enterprise, co-operatives, and minority enterprise board stakes in private firms would be the instruments of this intervention, given teeth by tripartite planning agreements concluded with the enterprise management and the workforce.

Conditions attached to the enterprise board investments would guarantee trade union rights, equal opportunity policies, socially useful products, and at least an initial instalment of industrial democracy for the workforce.

Legal and bureaucratic delays in County Hall meant that the GLEB did not get into effective operation until early in 1983. The re-election of a Tory Government, and the continuing low level of industrial militancy and mass confidence in London, meant that the GLEB came into operation without the degree of complementary support from above, or mass input from below, that the original blueprint envisaged.

In the event the popular planning unit at County Hall decided — wisely — to concentrate its activities in particular areas, such as Docklands, rather than spread itself evenly through London. And the preparation of the London Industrial Strategy, to guide the whole Industry and Employment programme, has proved a long drawn-out process, only now approaching publication — though particular chapters of it have been fed into GLEB's investment strategy.

Inevitably therefore, much of GLEB's investment to date has been reactive, responding to approaches from individual entrepreneurs or groups of workers. Nonetheless there have been successes, some of them spectacular.

Prevent closure

At the former Rediffusion factory in Wandsworth, GLEB was able to prevent the closure of a major South London industrial site. When the company moved to Crawley with most of the workforce, 100 workers faced the sack. GLEB was able to move in, ensuring the continuity of employment in four new companies run by the workforce and management. The rest of the site is available for letting to complementary companies in the electrical and engineering industries.

In this case it was in the company's interests to co-operate with the GLEB. But the example shows what could be done with greater resources and statutory powers.

Five community-based technology networks have been set up, inspired by the ideas behind the Lucas workers' alternative plan. Socially useful product ideas from the shop floor or the community can be developed in specially-provided workshops, in conjunction with specialists from the research departments of London's universities and polytechnics. Those which are economically viable can be developed into job-creating enterprises with

GLEB funding. Those which depend on political decisions for viability — such as a range of products for the health service — can be made the subject of campaigning for the necessary funds.

London's last volume bookbinding firm was relaunched under workers' management when a GLEB takeover with union support followed the private owner's closure. One result has been the setting up of a joint SOGAT chapel for women and men and agreement on the on the hiring of women apprentices for the skilled bookbinding trades — both equal opportunities firsts in a notoriously male preserve.

Union organisation

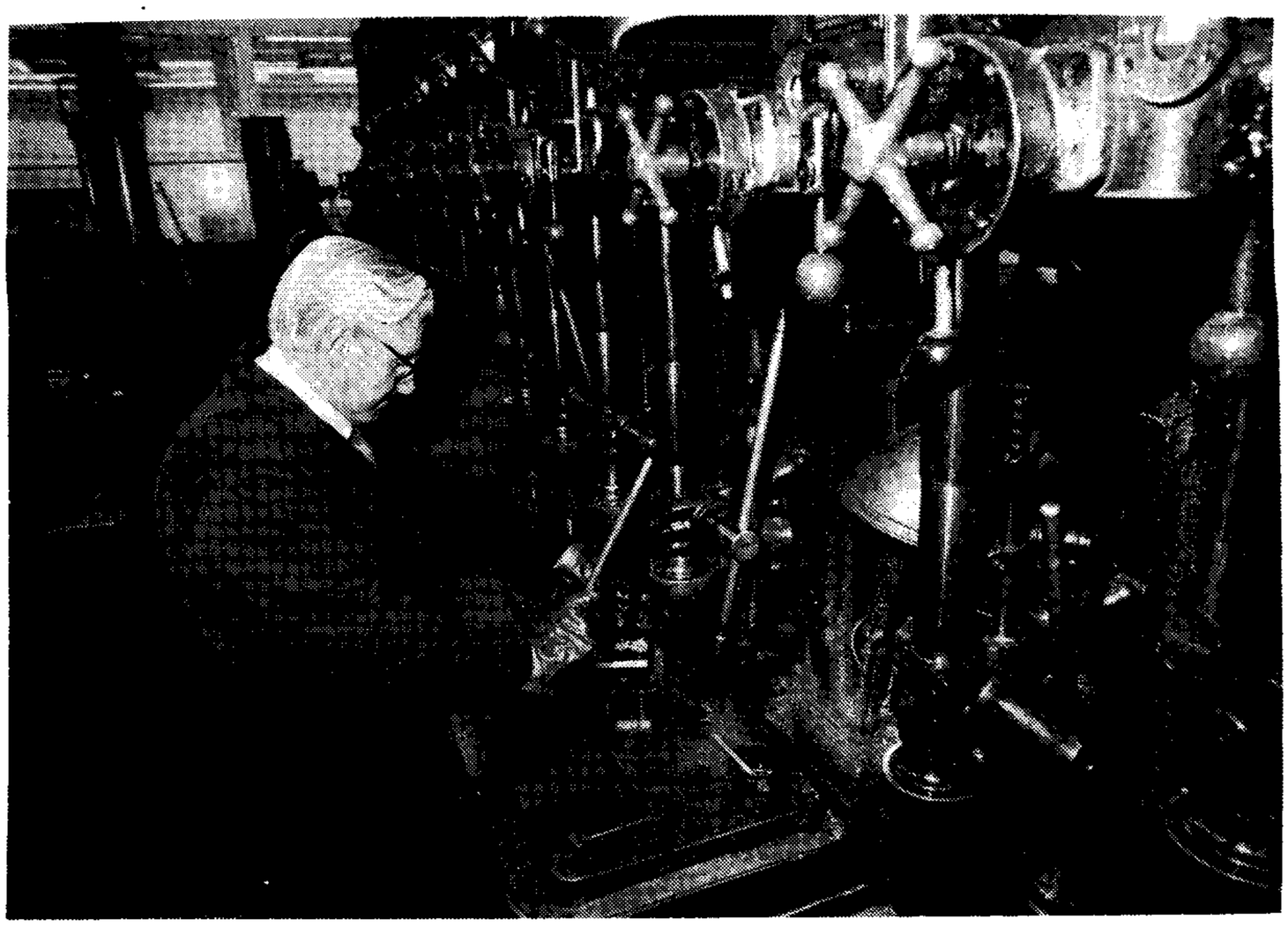
In dozens of companies, union organisation now exists where none existed before, thanks to GLEB intervention. And the first-ever training course in management skills for shop-floor workers has been organised, to equip worker representatives for bargaining with management over the future of the enterprise as a whole, including subjects previously excluded from collective bargaining.

GLEB is also pioneering a distinctive approach to new technology. It rejects the view that new technology should be counterposed to so-called 'smokestack' or 'sunset' industries, doomed to decline along with their workforces.

Instead, it seeks out applications of new technology which actually enhance and build on existing skills — such as the human-centred lathe being developed in conjunction with UMIST, or the computer-operated aircraft freight loader from Airlec Vehicles in West Drayton, which will proved 100 much-needed engineering jobs in West London.

As well as their direct relevance to London's unemployed, such a 'human-centred' approach to technology challenges the view that technology progress is an impersonal and unquestionable force which has already sealed the death-warrant of the existing industrial working class and its abilities. The fruits of this delusion range from the superficial whizz-kiddery of the media to shop-floor passivity in the face of unemployment. They also include tendencies on the Left which write off all technological progress as one-sidedly as the media endorse it: not to mention writing off the industrial working class too.

It is in the area of 'venture capital' for new tech start-ups that GLEB has won some of its strongest, if grudging, praise from 'establishment' circles. An



Chi Chan

Saved from collapse by GLEB. AMD Engineering, where traditional engineering skills are being linked to new technology.

historic weakness of British financial institutions has been their lack of interest in, or aptitude for, industrial innovation — a heritage of Britian's imperial role as a financial centre, making overseas investment a soft option compared with industrial modernisation at home.

GLEB has been able to use the commitment and professional financial and technological abilities of its in-house staff to fill this 'funding gap' in a small way and, in doing so, to extract a social 'rent' for the labour movement and the oppressed.

Valuable resource

In the absence of an active mass movement at the base, and a Left government to back up GLEB-type initiatives with central funding and a framework of national planning, GLEB is nonetheless a valuable resource for London's labour movement. And its propaganda value, as an object lesson in the feasibility of alternatives, contributes to remedying these two key defects.

Clearly the left must not allow the GLEB's work to be taken out of context. The demand must be that the GLEB and bodies like it, provided with massively greater resources, must be an integrated part of a national strategy for planning which will involve a major extension of public ownership, but of public ownership under democratic control of both workers in public sector industries and of the community.

But the possibility of GLC abolition could put this at risk — not only by the loss of funding but, even more by the possible threat to GLEB's social guidelines. The Government's abolition proposals contain no plans for GLEB to be abolished. And the Government is keen to see arrangments made for the present accountability to the GLC to be replaced by accountability to the boroughs.

A change in the policy guidelines would leave GLEB as little more than a municipal merchant bank. But a majority of Labour boroughs after the 1986 May elections would preserve the gains made so far. If time can be found from the major struggle over ratecapping, manifesto working parties should consider the role which GLEB, as a strategic resource, can play in backing a socialist strategy for industry and jobs in London.

JOCK VEALL

Jock Veall took his life on Saturday 16th March in a very deliberate act. He left no message. We who knew him and his organising energy and incisive thinking well, and worked closely with him in the mid-70s, and continued to know him since, were shocked and upset — shattered. We want the contribution of comrade Jock Veall to be remembered. We ask, do we — all of the left — care and do enough for comrades who fall by the wayside and then disappear — perhaps in a tragic end?

In Imperial College and in Camden housing and squatting campaigns in 1973-75, Jock's contribution to the struggle was creative, vital, dynamic and courageous. His role in the re-occupation of the famous '220 Camden High Street' activity centre and squat against speculation, was magnificent. His campaign work on Ireland and many other issues in the ten years following up to and including the miners' strike, and his activity in many left groups were equally dedicated and his theoretical acumen brilliant. He was an indefatigable soldier for socialism, decency and justice. All this was despite severe mental problems which began six years ago.

He struggled nobly against his illness – paranoia – which probably originated in his disturbed and difficult childhood. Sometimes when he felt ineffective and pointless – impelled by lack of money and job – he contemplated 'turning his switch off'. However in Springfield hospital, Tooting Bec, before Christmas he appeared to be getting better. Indeed probably he was, and was released before Christmas. Yet nevertheless like his step-brother had done two years before, he jumped off Beachy Head. Not an easy way.

We think, when Springfield hospital 'released' him – probably under pressure of staff cuts – they did not ensure he had adequate back-up as an out-patient at Guys Hospital; and anyway he would probably have been better-off back at Springfield.

To us the loss of Jack is a tragedy for ourselves and the left. Mental illness is not rare and there are others who, like Jock, get demoralised by events or depressed by what they see as hopelessness and failure in their lives and 'drop-out'. Many of them get ignored. Jock spent his last years flitting, almost desperately – when active – from one far-left group to another. We remember him to them. It seems perhaps he was looking – apart from for politics – for some alternative 'family' or reliable structure to feel belonging to. He didn't find it there. The tragedy of Jock Veall is a tragedy for us all.

Although Jock did get support from friends who provided a lot, many socialists under stress do not get adequate backing. When comrades have problems and fade away from the struggle it is incumbent on us all to find out what is going on and provide supportive systems and networks. We must build such support into our activity and organisations: we cannot afford to do otherwise.

Piers Corbyn, London
Dave Woolf, Leiston, Suffolk

Any comrades who wish to get in touch about any aspect of this article or make further contributions on the questions to Street Life please write to: 55 Innis House, East Street, London SE17 2JN (01-701 5691).

Barking women fight on!

Barrie Neal (Barking & Dagenham Health Emergency)

After a meeting of Redbridge DHA on Tuesday 2nd April, striking domestics reaffirmed their commitment to fight for jobs and cleaning standards at Barking Hospital.

Members of Redbridge DHA fully revealed their ignorance of what it takes to clean a hospital. Members in the debate spoke about 'acceptable levels of dirt'. Cllr Brunnen concede that he had no idea what the specifications for the existing contract were. However, Brunnen went on to support Tory council colleagues voting 5 to 1 to retain Crothalls for a further 4 years whilst 10 persons abstained.

Support for Crothalls' retention was founded on merely subjective views. The open debate failed to provide any scientific evidence to support claims of an improved cleaning performance by Crothalls Ltd. in the last month of the disputed 12 month contract.

Redbridge DHA's decision turned logic on its head. On their own terms the 12 month Crothalls contract had failed to satisfy them for 11 months. In the final month, on a subjective review of Crothalls performance Members were able to ignore nearly a year of Health Officer reports which had condemned cleaning standards.

Termination of the new 4 year contract can be invoked with 3 months' notice. Termination is dependent on Crothalls cleaning performance. It is essential that pressure is brought to bear on the Authorities to operate a regular and professional monitoring process, with public reports to DHA meetings.

Hospital Administrator, D. Behr, has now threatened to clear the site of the picket line. But, the Barking domestics are not going away.

On March 19th, 1985 the Domestics marked one year on the picket line with supporters and Labour M.P.s at an early morning mass picket. It was emphasised that the continuing commitment to the Barking Picket Line is vital. Forthcoming Union conferences must be used to build support for the Domestics.

Existing areas of action against privatisation are dangerously isolated. A strategy of struggle in individual districts is no defence to the threat posed on ancillary workers jobs.

More clearly the threat is now posed to Local Authority jobs and services in the Government Green paper. NHS and Local Authority campaigns must become linked. Learn the lessons of Barking and fight for a co-ordinated strategy across districts and boroughs to resist the auctioning of public service jobs.

Latest News on STRIKELINE 01-592 5038



John Chapman

Redbridge District Health Authority voting to renew its contract with Crothalls

Redbridge District Health Authority defied all reason and voted to grant Crothalls, the private contractors at Barking Hospital, a four year extension to their contract.

The domestics at Barking have been on strike for thirteen months and show no sign of backing down.

An eviction notice has now been served on one of the picket lines, so support from the labour movement is needed now more than ever. Contact: Strike Committee 14, Porters Ave, Dagenham, Essex 01-595 4525.

Unhygienic services

A major blow against private contractors was struck in the heart of Tory Bromley when Hospital Hygiene Services were kicked out of their Orpington Hospital contract.

Hospital Hygiene Services (HHS) took over the domestic services contract in September 1984. There have been reports of consistent lack of cleanliness in the Hospital and Clinics that HHS were "cleaning". What is particularly surprising is the speed with which Bromley Health Authority got rid of them — they were given just SIX DAYS notice. Compare this with the claims in Redbridge last month that Crothalls couldn't be kicked out of Barking Hospital for 5 months.

Bromley have now been forced to temporarily return the cleaning "in-house" (to NHS employees) while they go through the whole tendering process again.

The news across the rest of London is pretty bleak, with contracts going out left, right and centre. It is vital that Labour Party members in these areas work with the local unions to expose the private contractors for their appalling wages and conditions and also their total inability to keep hospitals clean in the hours they are tendering with. Local government services will be next in line as London Labour councils cave in over the ratecapping fight. Now more than ever, the need to link up with workers across the public sector is essential.

Kevin Flack, Lewisham East CLP

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