

# CUTS BULLETIN

## Cuts Conference pledges national campaign

Delegates from nearly 600 labour movement organisations attended the Labour and Trades Union Conference, called by Lambeth, on Saturday.

The Conference discussed the statement drawn up by the Organising Committee (comprising representatives of all the Lambeth Council Trades Unions, Labour councillors, constituency Labour parties and Trades Council) and amendments proposed by various organisations.

### Strong consensus

Mike Waller, Branch Secretary commented:

"The Conference reflected the deep concern amongst the Labour Movement about the effects on services and employment. It did for the first time bring all the local authority trades unions - NALGO, NUPE, UCATT, TGWU, GMWU etc. - and Labour Councillors together to discuss a plan of action.

"Unfortunately, a number of the amendments are rather irrelevant to the immediate problem but the strong consensus around the main programme for action and the agreement on a national campaign are vital.

"There is much work still to be done but we have at least taken a few steps towards building such a national campaign to persuade the Government to change their policy of dismantling public services".

### Large scale redundancies

Delegates agreed the broad analysis of the problems facing them, as outlined in the Lambeth draft statement:

Although local circumstances differ, and although individual local authorities and trades union branches will take their own decisions, there is a desperate need for unity around a common programme on which to fight the cuts. The fight cannot be delayed. In January many councils will be considering implementing massive cuts and/or making substantial rate increases when they come to the detailed drawing up of their budgets for the next financial year. If councils fail to persuade the Government to change their policies this course of action would result in large scale redundancies and a massive reduction in services. Whole areas of local government services would disappear.

The statement went on to explain how this situation has been caused by the Tories deliberate attack on local government jobs

## Special Branch Meeting

A Special Branch Meeting will be held on Tuesday 25th November to discuss what action we should now take. A full report on the Conference and on the first meeting of the Steering Group will be given to stewards at the Executive meeting on Monday 17th November. It is vital that you are represented at that Executive meeting - make sure that your steward (or a deputy) attends.

and services. Local authority budgets are being drastically cut back, housing programmes have been cut by 30% - and there is worse promised. As the Government is failing to meet its economic targets, it has promised to make further drastic cuts in public expenditure, much of the burden falling on local authorities.

### Rates 'no remedy'

Such problems can no longer be remedied by rate and rent increases - the cuts are too massive for this.

Ted Knight, in proposing the statement, put the question to the conference - where do we go from here? If nothing is done before the next election, he said, jobs and services will have been destroyed.

### No middle road

Delegates were strongly agreed that there is now no 'middle road' - the cuts are too massive for that. The 'middle road' strategy put before the Conference in an amendment proposed by Ron Keating, on behalf of the National Executive Council of NUPE was rejected. It suggested that Councils should raise the rates as far as possible and then resign and stand for re-election on a platform of 'local autonomy' and 'no cuts'.

One of the major weaknesses in the strategy was soon pointed out by a NUPE shop steward. "We all agree", she said, "that we must avoid simply passing the buck from Councils to Unions and then from Unions to Council. Ron Keating's amendment falls short of the necessity that the Tories cannot be defeated by Labour councils alone, without us being prepared to take action too. Councils and Trade Unions have their role to play." It was also pointed out later in the debate that Councils such as Lambeth were elected on a platform of improving services, and it would be somewhat absurd for councillors to stand for re-election on a platform that all labour councillors ought to be committed to anyway, namely no cuts in jobs or services.

### **'Real concern'**

The amendment put forward by the branch was proposed by Mike Waller, Branch Secretary, in a very well received speech which he used also to criticise some of the other amendments.

"This amendment is different from others on your order paper" he said. "It was not just passed by a G.M.C. or a group of shop stewards or whatever, it was passed by a meeting of over 1700 members after a long and heated debate that clearly showed our members real concern and fear for their jobs, and for the services they provide."

### **Only afraid of isolation**

Another NALGO delegate spoke later in support of the branch resolution and a complementary one from Hackney NALGO. "These are not pie in the sky demands" he said "but what we can all see must be fought for. I represent one of the more poorly organised sections of NALGO under a Tory council. And yet for the first time, members are now prepared to take action, blacking vacant posts and so on. The only thing they are afraid of is isolation".

### **National steering group**

Despite the loose structure of the Conference, a generally constructive debate was held and broad agreement was reached on the main issues at stake. A national steering group was set up which is to organise 'a systematic campaign to win support for mass action against the Tory attacks on local government! The steering group meets on 15 November; Mike Waller, Brian Martin and John Hosey will be attending for the branch. A recall conference is to be held in January.

### **Main programme**

- (a) The Draft Resolutions' basic approach of a national campaign to defend local government;
- (b) Industrial action of whatever kind is necessary if redundancies are threatened,

non-cooperation with new technology, to the detriment of jobs or conditions; non-cooperation with cuts in services to the public, all proposed by Lambeth NALGO;

(c) Measures to build a broad based campaign prepared for an all out strike if the Tories try and replace labour councillors with commissioners. This campaign to forge links with local tenants groups, private sector unions and the other public sector unions, proposed by Lambeth NUT and the AUEW;

(d) The Steering Committee to carry out organisation of the campaign and to call a further conference in support of any individual authorities under attack to ensure supportive action;

(e) Non-cooperation with council house sales.

### **What's all this about a general strike**

A three-line resolution which read 'That this Conference urges the TUC to prepare a plan for a general strike in protection of working class interests and living standards' was passed.

Mike Waller, Branch Secretary, criticised this amendment in his speech, pointing out that this approach is somewhat unrealistic and can hardly be expected to yield any concrete results. "For a start" he said, "the TUC could not be depended on to organise any opposition." Len Murray's action for May 14th was to go on holiday." he added. The amendment is unlikely to receive much attention (except from the press!)

### **Council house sales**

Council house sales proved to be a major issue at the conference, with many delegates speaking in support of our stand against sales and criticising Labour councils, including Lambeth, for deciding not to oppose them.

Lambeth councillor Matthew Warburton, chairperson of the Housing Committee, did not go down too well when he spoke in support of Lambeth's backing down over sales. He said that the Labour group had felt that the 'general issue' of cuts, and not sales, was the one to fight on.

### **Action spreading**

A meeting to exchange information about action on sales held after the conference was attended by 40 delegates from NALGO branches from all over the country. Branches now taking action include Camden, Hackney, Southwark, Sheffield, Newcastle, Glasgow, East Lothian, Mid Lothian, Motherwell, Dundee and Coventry. Several councils have now refused to sell, including Merthyr Tydfil, Rochdale and Bradford.