

# Special Branch Meeting

**Ace Cinema 10.30 am**  
**Wednesday 22 October**

The branch Executive Committee has called a special meeting to discuss two very urgent matters :-

1. Our attitude to the very serious financial situation facing the Council, and the cuts and possible big job losses which are on the cards for next year.
2. Our attitude to the Conference, called by the Lambeth Joint Trade Unions and the Labour Council for November 1st, to discuss urgent action against the cuts, including the possibility of taking industrial action

## Lambeth £10m in the red

The Council is nearly £10 million in the red. This is the result of a number of factors. The most important of these is the latest penalties imposed by the Government on Lambeth and thirteen other so called overspending Labour controlled Councils, mainly in the depressed inner-city areas. For Lambeth this means yet another cut of £3.5 million in Rate Support Grants (RSG), plus a cut of £7.5 million in the Inner City Partnership over the next 2½ years.

A further cut of anything up to 15% in the RSG is to be announced by the Government at the end of November. Other adverse factors include very high inflation (15-20%) and very high interest charges, now running at about £50 million a year.

## Massive rates increase?

Last year the Council was able to get out of a similar situation by putting up the rates by 50%. In this way the Council maintained jobs and services. This year the situation is different. The Council would have to impose an extra £60 rate bill on every household in Lambeth before March, and in order to stand still next year, would have to raise rates by a

further 70% or more after April. This is clearly not on. It is not only politically unacceptable to the Council but would prove very difficult to collect. Many residents could not afford such increases.

## Jobs and services directly threatened

Our jobs and services are therefore directly threatened. Government policy of substantially reducing the number of people working for local councils is now staring us in the face. Whole areas of services could be axed. Building workers, planners, and architects are particularly vulnerable. The Direct Labour Organisation could well disappear next year. In fact nobody is particularly safe.

## Conference to discuss joint action

In response to this very serious situation Lambeth Council, Lambeth NALGO and other local authority trade unions in the borough including UCATT, NUPE, GMWU, T&GWU jointly called a special national conference on November 1st to discuss urgent joint action about the cuts, including the possibility of taking industrial action on a country wide basis to defend our jobs and living standards.

## Existing branch policy

Up to now the branch policy of no cuts and no redundancies has been successful in protecting our jobs. Last year, we successfully forced the Council to withdraw 4½% cuts across each service area. This year the branch has maintained its no cuts stand in the face of yet more government cutbacks. Existing branch policy includes no redundancies, no cover of vacancies, no redeployment, no cooperation with measures to introduce cuts, no natural wastage, early retirement or voluntary redundancies which lead to cuts in staffing levels.

The branch E.C. decided in line with branch policy to take part in calling the conference, which will determine whether support exists among labour council and local



authority trade unions for a joint campaign to try and persuade the government to reverse its disastrous policies towards local government.

The September Quarterly Branch Meeting also approved the branch's support for the conference.

Even if the Conference had not been called, we would still have to adopt a policy to defend ourselves from the massive government cut backs now taking place in local council spending (at a time it should be added when Central Government spending on defence and the police is out of control and overspending in real terms by £1.8 billion).

## Where do we go from here?

The question we have to ask ourselves now is will our existing no-cuts policy work in the future? Will this policy protect our jobs and living standards? What are the options available?

We could accept the situation and prepare ourselves for substantial cuts and job losses in January and February when the Council has to make up its budget for next year, and for bigger cuts and more job losses after April, when the new reduced RSG comes into operation. Some members think that the Council will be able to get through without major cuts or

redundancies by imposing a vacancy freeze, do a little bit of trimming here or there and by having a voluntary redundancy and early retirement agreement.

Voluntary redundancies or early retirement will not find the money, and anyway these prove to be very expensive. Members should not expect nice big golden handshakes from the Council - it doesn't have the money. Accepting a package of cuts even if it included a vacancy freeze and a rates rise would still lead to job losses and would lay the basis for a bigger round of cuts in the future.

But don't let's fool ourselves. A package of cuts would have to fund about £10 million in this financial year and probably a further £8 to £15 million next year, which is the estimated reduction in the Rate Support Grant for 1981/82 to be announced by the Government at the end of November.

Don't have any doubts. The Government wants your job. Anybody watching Horace Cutler at the Conservative Party Conference last week will know this when he called for local councils to 'cut, cut and cut again', to rapturous applause.

## Executive Committee Recommendations

For these reasons your branch E.C. is not recommending accepting a package of cuts. It is on the contrary strongly urging you to maintain existing branch policy as the best means of defence.

But the E.C. recognises that this is not enough to combat the scale of cuts which are now on the cards. Therefore, the E.C. is recommending that branch policy be extended to include :-

- a. The possibility of taking further industrial action is necessary.
- b. Supporting the Conference called by Lambeth Joint Trade Unions and Lambeth Council to discuss and organise urgent national joint action to try and reverse government policies.

This decision was taken because the branch E.C. recognised that the Conference offered the only opportunity for co-ordinating the many local campaigns against the cuts into a national response to the government attacks on local government.

The E.C. believes that this Conference, combined with a strong local stand against the cuts, offer the only country-wide focus of opposition to present government policies and that it should be strongly supported.

There is nothing to lose by supporting the Conference and a lot to gain if it is successful.

