



Socialist News

The newsletter of
Lewisham Socialist Party

Our record



Socialist councillors are different



Defending education in Lewisham
Pages 4, 9, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 28 & 29



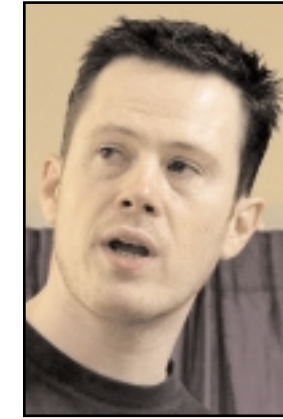
Fighting for 'decent standard' council homes
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Keep Our NHS Public!
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A report on the activities of Lewisham's socialist councillors



Chris Flood



Ian Page

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An introduction by the secretary of the local teachers' union



Martin Powell-Davies (left) is a science teacher at Catford Girls School, a parent of four children at Lewisham schools, and the elected secretary of the Lewisham association of the National Union of Teachers, representing teachers in schools throughout the borough. He writes here in a personal capacity.

EVERY FOUR years Londoners have the chance to elect their local borough council. In Lewisham there are 55 members of the council, three each from 18 different geographical districts - known as ward councillors - and the Lewisham mayor, elected across the whole borough. But what exactly is it that councillors do?

This report, produced by Lewisham Socialist Party, gives an account of the activities over the past four years of the two socialist members of Lewisham council, Ian Page and Chris Flood. Ian and Chris are councillors from the Telegraph Hill ward in north west Lewisham, 6,000 households stretching from the Kender triangle south of New Cross Road, to the Honor Oak estate in SE4.

What do councillors do?

THE TELEGRAPH Hill ward area has had at least one Socialist Party councillor representing it on Lewisham council since 1995. It was then that Ian Page, previously a Labour councillor, was expelled from the Labour Party for opposing cuts in council services. Such was the support Ian had in the local community, however, he was twice re-elected as a Socialist Party councillor, this time against the Labour Party.

Then, in December 2003, Ian was joined on Lewisham council by health worker Chris Flood, who won a by-election victory after a Labour councillor had resigned. Ian and Chris were re-elected, both with increased votes, in the last local council elections in May 2006.

A lot of the work that Ian and Chris do as local councillors is solid but unspectacular support for local people week-in, week-out, helping residents on a whole range of issues from education and housing, to planning hearings, park services, and traffic control. They are widely acknowledged as hard-working and determined fighters for the interests of local people.

But councillors are also responsible for the policy of the council - on how much to spend on local services, what to spend the council budget on, and how services should be run. The council also debates how it should represent Lewisham's interests to the government on national issues.

Fighting for local services

OVER THE years, it is true, local councils have been stripped of many of their powers over different services, for example over local hospitals and further education colleges. In addition the money available to them has been consistently cut by central government. The Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher, who began this process, famously said, "I must take more power to the centre to stop socialism".

What she really meant was that services like the NHS, state education, council housing and other aspects of the welfare state which protect people against the effects of 'market competition', should be opened up to private companies to make profits from public needs. But as people won't generally vote to

hand over vital services to 'profit-first' companies, the democratic control over services exercised through elected local councils had to be chipped away.

Unfortunately, the New Labour government has carried on with this approach. The turnover of private companies running public services reached over £80 billion in 2008, 126% higher than 1995-96, under the previous Tory government. Private profit is increasingly being put first in ever more aspects of our lives.

But councils still have enormous powers and responsibilities. Lewisham council still controls a budget of well over one billion pounds, spent on services from housing to schools, youth clubs, libraries, adult social care, crime reduction, sports centres, highways maintenance and refuse collection, to name but a few. It has legal powers, over some non-council provided services for example, that it can exercise for our benefit.

What councils do, and what councillors do, can still affect the quality of our daily lives. They certainly don't have to accept every dictat from central government to cut or privatise our services. They have a choice. This report shows how Ian Page and Chris Flood have used the opportunities open to councillors - from public campaigning to presenting policy motions to council meetings - to do everything possible to protect and improve our public services. For a trade unionist like myself, they are a reminder that 'politicians' don't have to be self-serving supporters of cuts and privatisation. Instead, these socialist councillors speak out in the interests of the millions, not the millionaires. We need more councillors like them!

Taking on the establishment parties

UNFORTUNATELY, HOWEVER, what is also clear from this report, is that they have had to stand up for well-funded and accountable public services in opposition to the councillors from all the main establishment parties - New Labour, the Tories and the Liberal Democrats. While there are secondary differences here and there between the parties - which Ian and Chris have sometimes been able to use to win victories in the council chamber - at bottom all the establishment parties now support the Tory capitalist 'free market system', which puts the profits of the super-rich ahead of the interests of working people.

The former Tory chancellor Geoffrey Howe was right when he said that Margaret Thatcher's "main triumph

was to have transformed not just one party, but two", by turning Labour into New Labour. But Lewisham Labour Party, and its local councillors, still had a choice on whether they would follow that road.

This report covers the activities of Ian and Chris since the last local elections in May 2006. These elections created a new situation in Lewisham, a 'hung council' with no party having an overall majority, the first time since 1971 that Labour did not control Lewisham council. With 27 Labour councillors (including the mayor), 17 Liberal Democrats, six Greens, three Tories and two Socialist Party councillors, every councillor's vote counted.

A report to be proud of

IMMEDIATELY AFTER the May 2006 elections the Socialist Party wrote to Lewisham's Labour councillors. They had a choice now. The Labour councillors could discuss with the Socialist Party on how they could work together to defend and improve our public services. Or they could reach an agreement with the Tories or the Liberal Democrats to carry on with New Labour-style privatisation and 'market methods' policies. They made their choice.

Lewisham Socialist Party has regularly distributed *Socialist News* leaflets to Telegraph Hill households throughout the last four years, reporting on Chris and Ian's activities. As one of the newsletters said after the 2006 elections, "many Telegraph Hill voters were still not totally convinced when the Socialist Party said that the main, establishment parties are, at bottom, all the same. Now we'll find out". This report provides the evidence of what happened next. The establishment parties are wedded to the idea that 'free market competition' is the only way to organise society, the disastrous consequences of which we can see in the current economic and financial crisis. But the Socialist Party, and its councillors, are different. □

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Victory for the Save Ladywell Pool campaign

THE FIRST big question facing the new council elected in May 2006 was what to do about the Labour councillors' plan to demolish Ladywell Leisure Centre in order to site a new secondary school there.

The shortage of secondary school places in north Lewisham has been a long-standing worry for parents, with many local children having to travel miles to get a school place. But years later, even after Labour councillors finally agreed that there was a problem, parents are still waiting for a new school to be opened where it is needed - in the north of the borough.

The Socialist Party councillors backed the local parent-led New School for New Cross campaign from the start. It was Ian Page who presented the first council policy motion supporting parents' demands, in 2001. New Labour, in contrast, have always been more interested in pursuing their own agenda than listening to the views of the local community.

First New Labour's failed 'Fresh Start' policy experiment led to the closure of Telegraph Hill school. Next they demolished the refurbished school building in Wallbutton Road in order to build the Crossways 16-19 Centre there - but without first making sure there was a suitable alternative site for a new secondary school.

Eventually the Labour councillors were forced to admit that there really was a shortage of secondary places in north Lewisham. But, rather than build a new school in the Deptford and New Cross area where it was needed, before the 2006 elections they planned to knock down the Ladywell Leisure Centre and swimming pool - recently refurbished at a cost of £2 million - to put it there.

Labour defeated in the council chamber

THE NEW School campaign had proposed a number of suitable alternative sites in Deptford. At a council meeting in June 2005 Ian Page proposed a motion calling for independent advisors to be appointed to investigate these sites. One was Convoys Wharf, owned by Rupert Murdoch's News International corporation (in the days when The Sun newspaper was still supporting Tony Blair and Gordon Brown!). Another was in Evelyn Street, owned by a property development company that was still seeking permission from the council to build luxury flats there. Lewisham council could have easily used its planning and compulsory purchasing powers to



Ian Page (right) on the first parents' demonstration for a new school in north Lewisham - nearly ten years ago!

obtain a suitable site.

At this stage, however, before the 2006 elections, New Labour had a clear majority of Lewisham councillors. So Ian's motion was rejected, by 33 votes to 13, with the New Labour councillors re-stating their determination to knock down Ladywell pool.

But after the May 2006 elections Lewisham became a 'hung council', with no party having an overall majority. During the election the Liberal Democrats, the Greens and even the Tories said that they supported both the New School campaign and the Save Ladywell Pool group. So straight after the election the Socialist Party councillors immediately called a meeting with the other parties to ensure that such words would be turned into action.

The chance came at the first policy-making meeting of the new council, which took place on June 14th. Ian Page jointly moved a motion formally calling on the mayor to look for a new site for the school and to keep Ladywell Pool open. With all the parties other than New Labour voting for this, the motion was passed. Labour had been defeated in a Lewisham council meeting for the first time in 35 years - to the delight of the packed public gallery of pool and school campaigners.

But problems remain with new school site

NEW LABOUR'S climb down over the demolition of Ladywell pool was a real community victory. Lobbies, demonstrations, petitions, meetings and election campaigns showed that united action could win. But problems remained.

The Socialist Party distributed one of its regular *Socialist News* newsletters (see below) to every household in Telegraph Hill ward welcoming the decision to save Ladywell pool. But we warned that the new site proposed for the new secondary school, the Lewisham Bridge primary school, "is far from perfect" - for a start, the plan would cut local primary school places in a housing development area, and was the site big enough anyway? The alternative sites proposed by the New School campaign were far better. By not seriously considering them, New Labour was putting the interests of property developers before local parents.

We also warned that "the new school is proposed to be part of a federation with Prendergast and Crofton, with the risk that it may become one of New Labour's new 'trust schools', with its own assets and admissions policies. We must fight to ensure the new school is a community school with a fully comprehensive intake".

"We need to continue to campaign together", the Socialist Party warned, "to ensure that the New Labour agenda for academies and 'trust schools' does not undermine opportunities for local children here in Telegraph Hill". Unfortunately, as subsequent events showed, our warnings were born out. □

Another 'doggy dossier'. A Lewisham Labour Action leaflet, (right) produced after they lost the council vote, claiming that they had saved Ladywell pool - from themselves presumably! You couldn't make it up...



A Socialist Party newsletter welcomed the climb down over the demolition of Ladywell pool, but warned about potential problems with the Lewisham Bridge site for a new secondary school.

A 'hung council'... what would Labour do now?

THE MAY 2006 local elections produced a 'hung council' in Lewisham, with no party having an overall majority. There were now 27 Labour councillors (including the mayor), 17 Liberal Democrats, six Greens, three Tories and two Socialist Party councillors.

The Socialist Party wrote to the Labour councillors, offering to discuss how we could work together to defend and improve council services. After all, a combined vote of 29 would be a clear majority in council policy making meetings. A 'new beginning' would be possible, we proposed, if Labour dropped its plans to demolish Ladywell Leisure Centre; agreed for independent assessors to examine the new school sites proposed by the New School campaign; gave council tenants the option of staying with the council to get 'Decent Homes' improvement works done; used the council's legal powers to resist ward closure plans at Lewisham Hospital; and suspended the then only recently revealed negotiations with Haberdashers' Aske's Academy to hand over local authority primary schools until a full public debate was held.

The New Labour councillors didn't reply. Instead, at the first meeting of the new council, they voted with the Tories to elect Barry Anderson, the Conservative councillor for Grove Park ward, as the council chairman, giving the Tories an extra casting vote if policy votes were tied. Unfortunately, this would not be the last example of a New Labour-Tory coalition. □

Where did your councillors stand?

For a new school... and save Ladywell pool?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Resisting council housing privatisation plans

THE NEXT council meeting was in July when a debate took place on Labour's plan to hand over the management of 17,000 council homes in the borough to a new Lewisham Homes 'Arms-Length Management' company (ALMO) by 2007. Ian Page and Chris Flood moved a motion at the meeting that Lewisham should organise a ballot of council tenants and leaseholders for them to decide whether or not their homes were to be transferred to the ALMO.

Like other councils across the country, Lewisham had to bring its council housing up to national 'Decent Homes standards' by 2010 (although the deadline has since been extended). The New Labour councillors claimed that they could only get the extra investment needed - estimated then at £145 million - by transferring homes under one of three 'options': selling-off homes to housing associations; private finance initiatives (PFI); or setting up an 'Arms Length Management' company (ALMO). In fact, all of these transfer 'options' were, albeit in significantly different ways, steps to the privatisation of council housing.

There was an alternative

THE CLAIM by Lewisham's Labour councillors that there was no other alternative to housing transfers was false. It is true that the New Labour government, backed by the Tories, have a long-term aim to end the protection that council housing provides against a 'free market' in housing - big landlords and housing companies whose real interest is not meeting housing needs but making profits. That's why both Tory and Labour governments have squeezed the housing funds available to councils since the 1980s. But councils could still resist the pressure.

Even in Lewisham some Decent Homes works had been carried out before the Lewisham Homes ALMO was proposed. It was no accident that a higher proportion of these than elsewhere in Lewisham were in Telegraph Hill ward, where tenants have consistently fought for housing services and have been backed up by the Socialist Party councillors. Councils similarly could stand up for council housing.

In December 2005, for example, it was announced that next-door Greenwich council had got the go-ahead to spend £200 million on Decent Homes. In an earlier consultation with tenants and leaseholders Greenwich had given not three options like Lewisham but four - including the option of staying with the council. This was the option overwhelmingly supported by tenants. Across the country, even by

the summer of 2008, there were still 108 councils that had not transferred their council homes to housing associations or set up an ALMO but were still carrying out Decent Homes improvements. There was an alternative.

At the time of the Greenwich announcement, before the 2006 elections, the Socialist Party councillors argued that Lewisham should follow that example, give tenants the option to stay with the council, and call on the government to give Lewisham the money needed. But their motion was defeated.

So what would happen now there was a 'hung council' - with the Liberal Democrats, the Greens and even the Tories promising before the July 2006 council meeting, to support the call for a tenants' and leaseholders' ballot before the Lewisham Homes ALMO was set up?

The danger of an ALMO

UNDER A so-called 'Arms Length Management Organisation' (ALMO) homes are still council-owned at first but are managed by the ALMO company, with unelected 'independent' business representatives on the board. Once Decent Homes refurbishment works are completed, however, the government has plans, backed by the Tories, for ALMOs to become more independent, taking on 'trading powers', for example,



The Hands Off Our Homes petition, launched by the Socialist Party councillors Ian Page and Chris Flood, demanding a real housing choice - the right to stay with the council, with full public funding to meet the Decent Homes standards.

"with the main purpose of making a profit"! (Government Review of ALMOs, June 2006). At the end of the day, all the 'transfer options' - selling-off homes to housing associations, private finance initiatives (PFI), or ALMOs - will eventually mean higher rents and service charges, less say by tenants and leaseholders, and less secure tenancies: the first stages in the privatisation of council housing.

But tenants can still block the sell-off plans. Under current laws, council tenants have a legal right to vote before their homes can be sold-off to a housing association. In the New Cross Gate area, for example, including the Kender estate in Telegraph Hill ward, there had to be a ballot on the plan to sell-off homes there to Hyde Housing Association (see page 18).

The situation is different for ALMOs, however, which are more like a 'privatisation in stages', drawn out over a number of years. For ALMOs there is no legal requirement for a tenants' ballot. Many councils have anyway organised votes before moving to set up ALMOs. But the New Labour councillors who controlled Lewisham before the 2006 elections typically used the legal loophole to decide not to have a ballot on establishing Lewisham Homes. After the elections however, with a 'hung council', surely a vote could be organised to give tenants and leaseholders the final say?

A partial retreat by New Labour

BUT NO! At the last minute the Liberal Democrat and Tory councillors shamefacedly withdrew their support for Chris and Ian's motion. On the night only the Green councillors and one Liberal Democrat 'rebel' voted with the Socialist Party for tenants' and leaseholders' right to vote. The other parties - New Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative - didn't trust them to vote the right way!

Nevertheless, the Socialist Party motion did force the New Labour councillors to make a partial retreat.

'Decent Homes' contract problems. Whose fault?

OVER THE years the Socialist Party councillors have had to intervene to support residents who have suffered from sub-standard Decent Homes and refurbishment work across the Telegraph Hill ward. They have pushed for meetings with contractors to sort out problems on the Honor Oak Estate, for Sector J properties, for Crossway Court, Fern Court, the Kender estate and Hutchinson House, and the Somerville estate. The problems have been the same but the contractors have been different!



But is this just down to poor work from the contractors? Or is it more to do with the shabby cost-cutting contract works that have been agreed by Lewisham's New Labour mayor and his 'cabinet' - leaving Lewisham council tenants and leaseholders to suffer the consequences. □

Keeping residents informed. A Socialist councillors newsletter from October 2006 on the problems on the Somerville estate

Labour moved an amendment rejecting a ballot now, but promising that any future plans by the 'Lewisham Homes' ALMO to take on new commercial powers would be subject to a ballot then. Tenants will still have a chance to stop privatisation then. The Socialist Party councillors will make sure this safeguard is not weakened.

Ian and Chris presented a 1,000-signature petition collected by the Lewisham Hands Off Our Homes campaign to the council meeting opposing all of Lewisham's homes transfer 'options'. While the council vote was lost, and Lewisham Homes would now be established without a ballot, the partial victory won meant that the campaign against privatisation was certainly far from over. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Supporting tenants & leaseholders right to vote on setting up the Lewisham Homes ALMO?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Votes on the NHS, council cuts... and councillors' allowances

EARLY IN 2006 Lewisham Hospital announced the closure of three of its wards. Like many other hospitals across the country at that time, it was facing a 'deficit' under the NHS 'internal market' system imposed by the New Labour government. Alarmed by such developments, the Lewisham Pensioners Forum contacted all Lewisham councillors and MPs before the September council meeting to ask them to add their voice in opposition to the 'market restructuring' of the NHS.

After consulting the Pensioners' Forum, Chris Flood presented a resolution to the meeting: "This council endorses the recently expressed views of the Lewisham Pensioners' Forum which welcomed the increased public funding for the NHS but is concerned about the billions going into restructuring on market lines, the millions being paid to management consultants and financial advisers, and the drain upon hospital budgets from the long term financial burden of private finance initiative (PFI) loans. This council joins with the Pensioners' Forum in calling upon the government for an immediate halt to these costly and wasteful measures".

These issues identified by the Pensioners' Forum - the 'NHS market' draining resources from our health service - returned with a vengeance in 2008 with the *Picture of Health* plans to cut hospital services in South East London (see page 24). But the New Labour, Liberal Democrat and Tory councillors rejected the chance to make an early statement on the dangers facing the NHS from the ever-increasing 'marketisation' of services, and voted against the pensioners' motion.

Council services cut... but not councillors' allowances!

THE SEPTEMBER council meeting also debated a proposal by New Labour to make £3.44 million of cuts to council services for the next financial year (from April 2007 to March 2008). The council has to set an annual budget each year in March but in Lewisham the New Labour councillors usually propose what they call 'first strand savings' in the Autumn, six months before the final budget.

A motion was proposed, supported by the Socialist Party councillors, the Liberal Democrats, the Tories, and five Green councillors, that the cuts should at least be postponed and subject to proper debate. These were not 'efficiency savings' but cuts with an impact on Lewisham services, for example, on Children and Young People's provisions. But they



Pensioners say, Keep Our NHS Public!

were pushed through by one vote because, incredibly, one of the Green councillors voted with New Labour!

One budget heading, though, escaped New Labour's cuts: councillors' allowances. Councillors do not get a wage for what they do. Many, like Ian and Chris, have full-time jobs, which they do alongside their work as councillors. But councillors do get a 'basic allowance', in 2006 it was £9,300 a year, and 'special responsibility allowances' for things such as being a 'council cabinet' member. The mayor's annual allowances in 2006 totalled £73,670 - the deputy mayor's, £47,600.

At the September meeting there was a proposal to increase councillors' allowances by 2.9% - a bigger rise than was being offered to nurses at the time! Ian and Chris proposed that the increase in councillors' allowances should be cancelled given that a cut in council services was being proposed. All the other councillors voted against this... ☐

Where did your councillors stand?

Supporting pensioners' NHS protest?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green	
Yes	No	No	No	Yes	

Opposing £3.44m cuts to services?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green*	
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	

* The Greens split, giving New Labour a majority for their cuts

Curbing councillors' allowances?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green	
Yes	No	No	No	No	

Socialist councillors are different

Challenging the Aske's Monson takeover

OVER THE autumn months information began to emerge about a plan by Lewisham's New Labour councillors to give Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College (HAHC) control of Monson primary school in New Cross. One hundred local parents went along to a 'preliminary consultation' meeting in October. The angry meeting only proved one thing - that this plan would divide parents and schools instead of bringing them together.

New Labour councillors argued that giving pupils at Monson school an automatic right to a place at Aske's would boost Monson's popularity. But giving just one school this advantage, while denying it to other primary schools, would be bound to set schools against each other.

The council's own figures showed that pupils from other local primary schools would have very little chance of getting into Aske's. Unless they already had a brother or sister there, or were selected for 'musical aptitude', Telegraph Hill youngsters would have even less chance under this plan of getting in to their 'local school' than before.

Aske's selective admissions policy

THEIR CHANCES are anyway reduced by Aske's selective admissions policy. For years, local parents have complained that Aske's have used their independent testing arrangements to unfairly select pupils who live a long way from the school gates. Ian and Chris, using councillors' powers to question officials, dug out figures revealing that, in the previous two years, over 40% of Aske's admissions were from home addresses over one and a half miles from the school and over 60% of admissions were from the highest 'Band One' ability groups.

The Socialist Party councillors argued that the council should not even start discussions with Aske's on taking over local schools unless they ended these unfair admissions arrangements. Schools should serve the whole of their local community, they said, not pick and choose pupils who are going to boost their position in the exam league tables.

Unfortunately, New Labour's policy is to encourage exactly this sort of polarisation. The 2006 Education Act, voted through parliament with Tory support, encourages more schools to become Academies or separate 'trust' schools in charge of their own admissions policies. Yet Academies have had very mixed results.

Research into Academy schools compiled by the National Union of Teachers shows that "where Academies are raising standards, they are doing it by improving their intake, rather than doing better with the same pupils". Wasn't this Aske's plan for Monson as well? The difficulties that were facing many pupils at Monson wouldn't really be solved, just transferred onto other local schools to deal with.

Debate the arguments

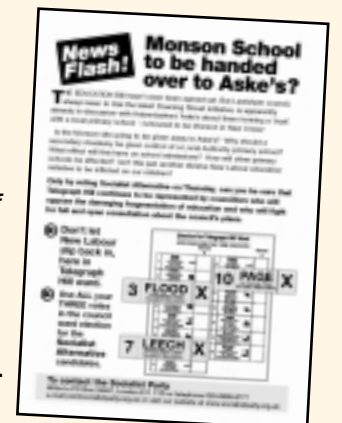
INSTEAD OF racing ahead with another damaging proposal, Ian and Chris called on the New Labour councillors to step back and at least debate the plan, with a real public inquiry to examine all the evidence.

It wasn't as if the 'preliminary discussion and consultation document' sent out in Autumn 2006 had shown any support for the plan. Instead, a clear majority of responses were "against this idea", an official council report admitted. "Six signed faxes were received from local head teachers stating that in their view the proposal was unjust". In total, eight responses were received from local primary schools other than Monson: from head teachers and staff, Governing Bodies and a Parents Teachers Association. All eight "registered objections to the proposal". Then there were the letters, e-mails and

Who mentioned all this in the 2006 elections?

THE MONSON takeover plan was first discussed with Haberdashers' Aske's senior managers in December 2005. But the New Labour councillors involved kept the plan secret - even though local elections for Lewisham council were due just five months later, in May 2006!

News of the talks leaked out, however, just days before polling day - and the Socialist Party produced a leaflet (right) making clear where we stood. *But that was the only mention made by any party of the plan!* In other words, not a single councillor in Lewisham was elected on the promise that they would hand over Monson school to Aske's. But why let democracy get in the way? ☐



Socialist councillors are different

What's wrong with democracy for Lewisham Homes?

NOVEMBER'S COUNCIL meeting also saw a further debate on New Labour's plan for an 'Arms-Length Management Organisation' (ALMO) to manage Lewisham's council homes.

Now that it was clear that they were going ahead with setting up the Lewisham Homes ALMO, Ian and Chris pushed to make sure that the ALMO management board was as democratically accountable to tenants and leaseholders as possible. Only this, they argued, could guarantee decent services.

Alongside a minority of appointed tenant and leaseholder reps, the ALMO board included so-called 'independent' business representatives from the construction industry, commercial property management organisations and housing associations. Who were they accountable to?

So Ian and Chris presented a motion to the November council meeting calling for the 'independent' places on the ALMO board to be democratically elected in a household ballot of tenants and leaseholders. Incredibly, however, the Tories and the Greens moved a joint amendment to reject this! Only one Liberal Democrat councillor supported Ian and Chris in thinking that democracy was a good idea.

Ironically, one of the 'independent' business representatives on the ALMO board is the director of London and Quadrant Housing Trust, one of the Housing Associations that was bidding to take over the Somerville estate in Telegraph Hill ward before tenants' protests stopped them. Yet now they were going to be on the ALMO board, managing the estate, without having to face a vote! So much for New Labour's claims that an ALMO would give tenants and leaseholders a bigger say... ☐

The New School site

THERE WAS also a debate at the November meeting on a motion congratulating the Save Ladywell Pool and the New School campaigns and committing to a target date for a new school at Lewisham Bridge by 2010. Ian and Chris presented an amendment and expressed some of their concerns, including a call for the new school to be a comprehensive community school and opposition to any cuts in primary school provision, including teachers' jobs, at Lewisham Bridge. This was not debated, however, as the other parties stopped the discussion, using questionable 'advice' from the council's Head of Law that it might influence what is supposed to be a 'neutral' public consultation. ☐

petitions from parents at other local primary schools, all overwhelmingly against.

Given this the Socialist Party councillors presented the following motion to the November 2006 council meeting: "This council notes the widespread concerns generated by the proposal that Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College academy take over Monson primary school, and the profound implications of this proposal for primary school provision and secondary admissions in the north of the borough".

"In this light we call upon the council's Children and Young People's Select Committee [with all-party representation] to study the proposal, taking evidence from parents, the teachers' unions, Aske's representatives, head teachers, educational experts and any other interested parties. We also agree that no firm decisions be taken on the proposal to incorporate Monson into Aske's until the Select Committee has completed its report".

The Green councillors voted with the Socialist Party for the motion. But the Liberal Democrats, the Tories and New Labour voted against.

This unity between the three establishment parties is just another example of how similar New Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dems have become. Believing that the 'free market' provides the solution to all problems, they all support the transfer of public services out of the control of elected local councils. In education they may sometimes disagree on the means but they all support a 'dog-eat-dog' competitive system, where unaccountable high-status Academies or 'trust schools' will effectively select pupils at the expense of their neighbours. Real parental choice is going, and the chance of a level playing field for all pupils through a fair admissions system. But the campaign to stop the takeover was not finished yet. ☐

Where did your councillors stand?

For a public debate on the Aske's Monson takeover plan?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Democracy for the Lewisham Homes 'ALMO'?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	No

New Labour feel the heat on Trident and the NHS

JUST BEFORE Christmas 2006 the then prime minister Tony Blair launched a government 'white paper' [policy statement] on the planned replacement of the Trident submarine nuclear weapons system. He made a tokenistic call for a 'public debate' on the issue, to 'inform the decision' that parliament would make in March. But how would people's views be expressed?

That was why, accepting Blair's 'invitation' to debate, the Socialist Party councillors submitted a motion to the January 2007 council meeting, declaring "that the £20 billion earmarked for a Trident replacement, plus the annual running costs of £1.6-£1.9 billion, would be better spent on improved public services". The motion called on Lewisham's three Labour MPs to vote against replacing Trident when it came before parliament.

Opening the council debate, Ian Page drew a contrast between the cost of Trident over its 30-year life span and the estimated resources needed to meet the Stern Report's target of cutting Britain's carbon emissions from 150m tonnes to 60m by 2030. Both figures come in at around £76 billion - but a new nuclear weapons system is of little use in fighting global warming!

Some councillors backed Trident. "Who knows what the world will be like in 30 years time?", one asked rhetorically. But we know something about the future. The Stern Report predicts that if global warming hasn't been contained, in 30 years time there inevitably will be intense conflicts for resources in the ecologically ravished world that will exist then. If society is still organised as it is today, on a capitalist basis divided into competing nations, with giant corporations still putting profit before the environment, the prospects for humanity will be bleak indeed - whether Britain has nuclear weapons or not.

The Green councillors backed the motion, the Tories opposed it. The Liberal Democrat and New Labour councillors were split, but enough from both groups voted for the motion to ensure that it was passed. Lewisham became the first local authority to take a stand on the enormous and criminal waste of public money that Trident represents.

Backing the NHS protests

ALSO PASSED was another Socialist Party resolution committing Lewisham to support the March 2007 Day of Action organised by the Trades Union Congress initiated NHS Together campaign.



Ian Page (left) joins the march on parliament against NHS cuts, November 2006

In contrast to the council meeting in September 2006 when New Labour, along with the Liberal Democrats and Tories, had refused to back a motion on the NHS from the Lewisham Pensioners' Forum (see page 8), this time none of the other councillors dared to oppose the motion and it was passed unanimously.

This shift followed a period of growing nation-wide protests against NHS cuts. This had led the then health secretary Patricia Hewitt to admit, after e-mails were leaked to *The Times*, that the Health Department had drawn up a secret 'heat map' showing areas where there is 'strong public unrest' about NHS cuts and re-organisations. The more 'heat' there was in an area, the less likely it was that cuts would go ahead.

The fact that Lewisham's New Labour councillors were forced to change their position four months after the September meeting shows that they too can be made to feel the heat - on the NHS and other issues too, when a campaign is organised and there are socialists in the council chamber to put them on the spot. ☐

Budget debate on adult social care

THE COUNCIL meeting on March 1 to set Lewisham council's budget for 2007-08 took place against a background of a national debate on spending on care for the elderly, people with disabilities, or those suffering from mental ill-health.

Such adult social care services are provided by local councils under a national 'Fair Access to Care' set of criteria. But a Commission for Social Care Inspection report earlier in 2007 had shown that councils were increasingly restricting services. Lewisham was no different.

Before the budget-making meeting the New Labour councillors had presented plans for immediate cuts in adult social care of £1.726 million and future cuts, after a public 'consultation', of £1.612 million, from increased charges for care services and changing the eligibility criteria. But in a 'hung council' they needed another party's support to get them passed.

What was a surprise for the 100-strong lobby outside the Town Hall was that on this occasion the Green Party councillors combined with the Tories and New Labour to push through a joint budget.

Why did the Greens vote for cuts?

THERE WERE some minor changes which the Greens achieved to Labour's initial proposals. The immediate cuts in spending on adult social care were now £1.566 million (from £1.726 million). But that still meant day centre staffing levels reduced and other 'staffing changes savings' (cuts). Transport for shopping, day centre visits and evening clubs would be cut. And the formal consultation on increased charges and changing the eligibility criteria for care would still go ahead. So why did the Greens vote for Labour's budget?

The Greens thought it was a 'positive achievement' that New Labour was now promising that the review of care services would not be given a 'savings target' in the council's budget plans. "We are buying time", said one Green councillor, "to re-shape services with an open mind".

But this was effectively just a 'presentational shift' - spin - by New Labour. Lewisham would not be exempt from the national drive to cut back care budgets and the issue would return again and again. By voting with New Labour the Greens had missed a chance to send a clear message to the government that Lewisham would not co-operate with cutting services to the old and vulnerable.

In the debate Chris Flood exposed the reality of what an eligibility criteria review would mean, with or

without a 'savings target'. People qualifying for care if they have what are termed 'substantial needs' would be re-assessed as having either 'greater' or 'lesser' needs. Chris read out some of these categories: people who, without help, would remain in the same clothes day and night, wet or soil themselves, would dehydrate or become malnourished, or would have accidents or serious mishaps. He challenged the other parties: which were the 'lesser' needs that they would cut? What was needed was not a 'consultation' but a clear statement that such changes were unacceptable.

Community education cuts & rent rises

THE BUDGET meeting also debated community education services in Lewisham. They were also under threat, because of government cuts to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Rather than taking on the full £1.3m funding needed to maintain services, and then mounting a challenge to the government for the necessary resources, the Labour/Green budget agreed some money but also proposed £800,000 cuts. These included a 15% reduction in classes, reduced opening hours at adult education centres, and increased student fees. On the other hand, as Chris Flood pointed out, the Labour/Green budget proposed to increase spending - by £700,000 - on 'clienting capacity', to step up work on privatisation plans!

The meeting also voted for an above-inflation rent increase for council tenants, while cutting housing services, and for new 'lumber charges' which would encourage fly-tipping - even though every one of the council's tenants' consultation meetings had opposed these. Ian and Chris were the only councillors to vote against. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Protecting adult social care services from cuts?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green	
Yes	No	Yes	No	No	

Opposing above inflation rent increases & new lumber charges?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green	
Yes	No	No	No	No	

Socialist councillors are different

The Bring Back Democracy campaign

APRIL 2007 saw a council debate on whether or not Lewisham should continue with its 'executive mayor' system of running the council. This was the culmination of a Bring Back Democracy campaign launched earlier in the year, backed by the Socialist Party, Liberal Democrat, Green and Conservative groups on Lewisham council, and campaign groups such as the Save Ladywell Pool and New School campaigns.

Lewisham is just one of 12 councils, out of 376 in England and Wales, with an 'executive mayor'. This means that the mayor has greater powers over the decisions the council takes than the other 54 equally democratically elected councillors representing the borough's 18 geographical wards.

The mayoral system is favoured by New Labour and the Tories because it fits with their aim to weaken the powers of local councils. Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher, who introduced 120 pieces of legislation reducing council powers, openly admired the American model. In the US many cities are run by 'big personality' mayors, supervised only by elected 'boards' who meet once a year to hand out contracts for public services to private providers. Its far easier, in such a system, for one person to take unpopular decisions to cut or privatise services - or to favour business interests - than to win support for such policies amongst a wider group of councillors, who have to justify themselves to local electors.

The Ladywell pool example

ACCORDING TO Lewisham council's constitution, for example, the mayor, Steve Bullock, had the power to ignore the June 2006 council meeting vote not to demolish Ladywell Leisure Centre. But in north Lewisham, where the decision had most impact, a clear majority of the *locally elected* ward councillors wanted to save Ladywell pool. Why should the mayor be able to override local representatives?

Steve Bullock was elected mayor in 2006 with the support of just one in eight Lewisham voters (22,155 votes, 12.4% of the 177,942 electors). It is true that his decisions can be overturned, but only if two-thirds of councillors (36 out of 54) agree. But why should one individual have so much power anyway?

The mayoral system was introduced in Lewisham, following New Labour's Local Government Act of 2000, after a referendum held in October 2001. Then just 9.2% of Lewisham voters said Yes (16,822 to 15,914 No votes), with many 'spoilt ballot papers' not counted. There was certainly not overwhelming enthusiasm for this 'experiment' in local democracy.

Socialist councillors are different

That was why the Bring Back Democracy campaign was launched - to get a new referendum to allow local people to decide whether to keep the 'one-person rules' mayoral system in Lewisham or restore the powers of locally elected councillors.

A new referendum?

EARLY IN 2007, however, the New Labour government published a new local government bill. Realising that local mayors had not proved to be popular, this proposed a new law to prevent the 12 councils that already had 'executive mayors' - like Lewisham - from holding a new referendum to abolish them for ten years! As the government white paper said, "once an authority has opted for a directly elected mayor or executive the presumption will be that it should not move back". It was still possible to have a referendum in Lewisham before the bill went through parliament, but the councillors would have to act fast.

Before the meeting, however, the council's Head of Law, an unelected official, 'advised' the councillors not to proceed with a referendum, because the government might step in to stop it. Ian Page circulated a detailed rebuttal to the other councillors, showing that this was contestable advice, to say the least. But it was enough to give the Tory councillors an excuse to abandon the Bring Back Democracy campaign and, when the vote came, the motion was defeated. Once again, a Tory-New Labour coalition had won the day in the council chamber. □



'Sir Steve' Bullock, elected by just one in eight voters. Why should one person have so much power?

Where did your councillors stand?

For a new referendum on the 'one-person rules' mayor system?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	

The East London Line closure

APRIL'S COUNCIL meeting also discussed the impact of the proposed closure of London Underground's East London Line from December 2007 to June 2010. Transport for London (TfL) had announced it was to begin the line's expansion, and its connection with the North London railway, which was to be renamed London Overground.

The new Overground is not going to be fully in public ownership. Eight different companies will be involved in complex contractual relationships to operate, maintain and renew the signalling, track, trains and stations, a recipe for competitive buck-passing on issues like safety, schedules and cost. That was why Ian and Chris supported the campaign by the RMT transport workers' union for full public ownership of the new line. But now the line closure was going ahead and the impact of that on Lewisham residents needed to be discussed.

Following a public consultation meeting, the Socialist Party councillors submitted a motion to April's council meeting, welcoming the extension but expressing concern with TfL's plan to close the entire line for thirty months. The motion committed the council to lobby TfL for a phased or sectional closure programme to carry out the extension works.

Of course, some period of complete line closure would be necessary on technical and engineering grounds. So the motion also called for transport replacement arrangements to include the temporary re-zoning of London Bridge as a Zone Two station for 'transit journeys' that start and finish outside the expensive Zone One. Otherwise, East London line users would face the 'choice' of massively increased journey times for at least two and a half years or going through central London overground stations like London Bridge or Cannon Street and paying an extra fare each time for the privilege.

At the consultation meeting a temporary re-zoning was 'ruled out' as impractical. But with Oyster card technology London Bridge could have easily been re-

zoned for such transit journeys. And the Department of Transport could have easily instructed the private train operating companies, Southern and SouthEastern, to introduce Oyster before the East London Line was closed. The real reasons, however, became clear at the council meeting.

TfL lobbies for private train companies' profits

IN AN unusual piece of lobbying, every councillor received a letter from TfL's Director of Development explicitly opposing the motion's call to re-zone London Bridge. "Although this might initially seem attractive", the letter argued, "it is not viable... the train operating companies, which are privately run, have estimated that this would cost them around £100 million in lost revenue". Ian Page responded, asking what the train operating companies' estimate was of the extra profit they would earn if London Bridge wasn't re-zoned. For some reason that figure 'couldn't be worked out'!

This intervention by TfL was instructive. TfL is the transport arm of the Greater London Authority, a democratically-elected body led at that time by the Labour mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. Yet here it was, lobbying on behalf of its private sector 'partners' profits. Doesn't this say everything about whose interests come first in New Labour's 'public-private partnership' and PFI private finance initiative schemes? These are 'partnerships' in the same way that a horse is 'a partner' for its rider!

Despite this intervention the New Labour councillors grudgingly supported the Socialist Party motion. The New Labour Deputy Mayor, Heidi Alexander, used her entire five minutes speaking time to attack the Socialist Party. "Unlike the socialists I live in the real world and there you have to work constructively with your partners behind closed doors to get things done", she said. Just how grudging this support was, however, was revealed when the issue was re-debated at the council meeting in June (see next page). □

COUNCILLORS ARRIVING for May's meeting were greeted by around 300 parents, pupils and teachers who had marched on the Civic Suite from the Lewisham Park memorial, in a demonstration organised by the Defend Education in Lewisham campaign, launched earlier in the year.

There was a big contingent from Brent Knoll special school protesting at the council's special educational needs re-organisation plans (see page 17). There were also parents and staff from Lewisham Bridge school.

Ian Page spoke to the demonstration, declaring his support for the different campaigns involved. Lewisham council's official consultations on their plans had "put the 'sham' into Lewisham" he said, and hadn't considered the needs of local people.



A victory for the Bungalow estate tenants...

LEWISHAM'S TENANTS won a victory against New Labour's homes privatisation plans at June's council meeting.

One area due for privatisation was the Excalibur estate, also known as 'the Bungalow estate' because it comprises 180 or so 'pre-fab' bungalows, built as temporary housing 60 years ago to deal with the immediate post-war housing crisis.

Although built as temporary housing - none of the properties meets the Decent Homes standards - most of the tenants enjoy living on the estate, with more spacious homes and gardens than current building standards, and a good community spirit. But the New Labour councillors claimed the £5.3m cost of Decent Homes refurbishment was not 'value for money' and proposed a stock transfer to the London & Quadrant (L&Q) Housing Association, who would demolish the estate, build homes for sale, and use that as a 'cross subsidy' to re-house Excalibur tenants.

Under prompting from Chris and Ian, the Liberal Democrat, Green and Tory councillors agreed to come behind a straightforward motion simply opposing the demolition of the estate. Ian Page was interrupted four times by applause from Bungalow estate tenants in the public gallery, including when he pointed out that the allegedly 'excessive cost' of £5.3m to refurbish the homes was equal to what the government was then spending each day to keep troops in Iraq! New Labour called in the council's legal officer to try and sway the vote, which had an effect on one of the three Tory councillors who abstained. But the motion was passed anyway, in an important victory for council tenants.

...but a setback for commuters

THE NEWS wasn't so good, however, for Lewisham's commuters. The council meeting on April 25th had unanimously agreed the motion moved by Ian and Chris calling for London Bridge station to be temporarily 're-zoned' as a Zone Two station while the East London underground line is closed for thirty months for extension works (see page 14).

Since April a meeting had been arranged between councillors, Transport for London (TfL - the transport

arm of the then Labour-led Greater London Authority) and the two local private train operating companies, Southern and Southeastern. The private train companies didn't bother to turn up, however, just sending in a letter opposing the re-zoning plan as 'excessively expensive', which TfL went along with. Under pressure from Ian, Transport for London were forced to admit that an alternative pass system had operated during previous East London closures - before rail privatisation - but they claimed that records on how it worked had been lost! At bottom TfL were just not prepared to fight the private train operating companies on commuters' behalf.

So the Socialist Party councillors presented a motion to June's council meeting calling on the Department of Transport to intervene. After all, as Ian pointed out, the previous week the government had awarded the London Midland rail franchise to Govia, the parent company of Southern and Southeastern, with a £1.1 billion public subsidy - the train-operating companies could hardly plead poverty!

But this didn't convince the New Labour councillors nor, incredibly, the Green group leader, Darren Johnson. Denouncing the Socialist Party's 'empty rhetoric', he argued that re-zoning London Bridge would create 'capacity problems' there - effectively he was saying that low-income users of the East London line should be priced off the railways! Because four of the Green councillors joined with New Labour (one voted with us and one abstained) the motion was defeated. But the Socialist Party will continue to fight for public transport that is accessible to all - a genuinely green transport policy. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Opposed the demolition of the Bungalow estate council homes?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Re-zone London Bridge during the East London Line closure?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Our new school should be a community school!

THE SAGA of the campaign for a new secondary school for north Lewisham took a new twist at July's council meeting.

Throughout the long campaign there was never any suggestion that the new school - now planned for the Lewisham Bridge site - would be anything but a local authority run community school. Over the summer, however, the New Labour councillors started saying that a private body - like the 'Leathersellers' company who run Prendergast school - should control the school instead.

Another step to a dog-eats-dog schools system

GIVING THE new school away to become a 'Trust', 'Academy' or 'Foundation' school, would mean that school admissions arrangements, the employment of teachers and other school staff, and the ownership of the site and school buildings, would no longer be in the hands of the elected council.

Staff at Lewisham Bridge primary were already far from convinced about squeezing an 'all-through' school, combining their primary school and the new secondary school, onto the Lewisham Bridge site. But now they wouldn't even be council employees.

Instead of a planned comprehensive system, admissions could start to splinter into a 'free-for-all' between schools, with the gap between the 'best' schools and the rest widening further. But that would mean many families and children would lose out.

Councils are pressurised into privatising schools by New Labour's 2006 Education Act which means that they can no longer just build and run a new school. Now they are told to hold a 'competition' to see who should run it instead.

There was an alternative

UNLIKE LEWISHAM, however, some councils have fought to hold on to their schools. Earlier in 2007, the London Borough of Haringey, for example, decided to put in its own 'bid' to run its new school as a community school. It successfully beat off other bidders including, ironically, Haberdashers' Aske's, so that the council could run the school as a local authority comprehensive. But if Haringey could, why couldn't Lewisham?

So at July's council meeting the Socialist Party councillors moved a motion for Lewisham to make a bid for the new school to be a community school. While they criticised the whole damaging

'Grammar schools by other means'

THE TORIES announced in May 2007 that they were abandoning their policy to re-introduce 'grammar schools in every town'. Their then education spokesperson, David Willetts, defended this against Tory diehards by arguing that instead they could use New Labour's education 'reforms' to establish the selective education system that they wanted. Private company sponsored 'Trust', 'Academy' or 'Foundation' schools - controlling their own staff, admission policies and school assets - could become 'grammar schools by another name'. From their own mouths... ☐

'competition' legislation, they challenged the New Labour councillors to at least make the case for the new school to be a local authority comprehensive school. But they refused!

The mayor, now the newly knighted 'Sir Steve Bullock', attacked "1970s politics", while other councillors accused Ian and Chris of delaying a new school. Ian responded that New Labour wanted to take us back not to the 1970s but the 1870s, when education for working class children was provided by charities or factory schools. And didn't New Labour's opposition to local parents' call for a new school for over four years delay things slightly more than bidding now for a community school?

The Greens and the Liberal Democrats supported the motion but, once again, the Tory councillors gave New Labour a majority.

There was one amusing but also telling incident. The Tory councillors sit on the same side of the council chamber as New Labour. When one Tory spoke he started by saying that he was sympathetic to the motion and 'I wish I could support it'. A parent in the public gallery shouted, 'well leave the Labour Party then', mistaking him for a Labour councillor. But then, what is the difference? ☐

Where did your councillors stand?

For the new school to be a community school?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Socialist councillors are different

The special schools re-organisation

THROUGHOUT 2007 an official council 'consultation' had taken place on plans to re-organise special educational needs provision.

The Socialist Party councillors argued that any move to transfer places for children from special school to mainstream schooling could only succeed if sufficient funding was available to provide the individual support, staffing, specialist training and resources needed to support them. However, there was no evidence that the New Labour councillors were willing to invest in such additional resources. Indeed, too many young people were already failing to have their needs adequately supported and the new plans could increase those difficulties.

Chris and Ian were also concerned the pressures would be even greater on schools that have significant levels of need to meet within their classes. New Labour's proposals suggested that there would be a considerable reduction in the number of Lewisham pupils 'statemented' for 'low level special education needs', which could result in the inappropriate placement of students in mainstream classes without adequate support and resources. The problems this could cause would be compounded by the unbalanced intake between different secondary schools in the borough, in a situation where three schools already had their own admissions policies.

The 'consultation' had revealed overwhelming opposition from parents and staff to the plan to close the provision for primary-aged pupils with special educational needs at Brent Knoll School. It had also revealed big concerns about the proposal to close the Meadowgate site, at Revelon Road in Telegraph Hill ward, and to transfer provision for Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) to a new amalgamated school on the Pendragon site in Downham.

The reduction in special school places that would result would not be adequately compensated for by the council's plans, Ian and Chris argued, nor had the New Labour councillors shown how an all-through provision for ASD pupils aged from five to 19 could successfully operate on this small site.

A chance to listen to parents' concerns

MOST WORRYINGLY there was also evidence that, once again, New Labour's 'private profit from public services' agenda was driving all this. A report to the mayor earlier in the year had stated that changes to special needs provision were a "requirement of the



The liveliest contingent on May's Defend Education in Lewisham march was from the Brent Knoll special school. Students and parents told the demonstration how important the school was for children who suffered from a lack of support in mainstream schools. As one parent said "This isn't about catering for our children's needs. This is about money!".

capital funding provided by the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme" [Mayor and Cabinet Report, 10 January 2007, paragraph 5.6]. Was the special schools re-organisation really about achieving the best outcome to support special needs education in Lewisham?

By September the 'consultation' had come to an end and the councillors had to decide. The critical meeting was the council's Children and Young People's Select Committee on 20th September. Ian Page is a member of this committee and the September meeting was attended by three Liberal Democrats and just two New Labour councillors, so there was a real possibility to defeat their plans.

Ian moved that the committee recommend not to proceed with the proposals, "in the light of the lack of detailed information on key matters such as funding, training, resources, staffing and the absence of plans showing that the proposed sites have the capacity to meet expected needs". But he was defeated, this time by a 'Lib-Lab pact' of Liberal Democrat and New Labour councillors, who chose once again to ignore parents' and teachers' concerns. ☐

Where did your councillors stand?

Listened to parents' & teachers' concerns on special schools plans?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	The Tory and Green councillors were not represented at the council committee meeting
Yes	No	No	

Socialist councillors are different

Hands Off Our Homes victory in New Cross Gate

FIVE DAYS before Christmas 2007 news came out that New Labour's plan to privatise 1,350 council homes in the New Cross Gate area, one third of them in Telegraph Hill ward, had been defeated. In a postal ballot carried out in November and early December, 55% of tenants had voted No, with 45% voting Yes, on a 57% turnout (higher than general election turnouts in the area). This was a fantastic victory for council tenants, the Hands Off Our Homes campaign, and the Socialist Party councillors.

New Labour's plans

LEWISHAM'S NEW Labour councillors have enthusiastically backed government plans to phase out council housing, pushing through PFI schemes, setting-up an 'arms-length management company' (ALMO), and handing over homes to housing associations.

PFI's cover 5,000 council homes in Lewisham and, while only a first step to privatisation, the Lewisham Homes ALMO had been established in January 2007 to manage 17,000 council properties (see page 6). In the 18 months before the New Cross Gate ballot 8,000 homes had been transferred to three housing associations, London & Quadrant, Phoenix and Hyde, after four transfer ballots had been won with Yes votes of 68%, 78%, 84% and 86%, largely in south Lewisham.

The New Cross Gate ballot, however, had been delayed from its original planned date in autumn 2006, as the New Labour councillors realised that they would have a bigger fight on their hands. In 2000 they had tried to transfer council homes in north Lewisham to Hillgreen Homes but, after a tenants' campaign backed by the socialist councillors, lost the vote. This time, by linking council properties in Telegraph Hill ward to those in the neighbouring 'Labour heartland' New Cross ward, they hoped to be able to isolate Ian and Chris and push through a Yes vote. The plan was set.

Hyde's stakes

HYDE HOUSING Association was a willing accomplice. One of the largest in England, with 30,000 properties, it openly embraces New Labour's commercialisation of social housing agenda. It had recently undergone a 'business culture change' programme, for example, "to make the organisation as a whole operate on a commercial basis", in the

words of its chief executive, shifting "the traditional perception that 'not for profit' means 'no profit'." (Inside Housing magazine, 14 September 2007)

There were high material stakes. With average house prices in Lewisham at £223,308 at the time, public assets of up to £290 million at market value were involved. Under questioning from Ian Page, the council revealed that Hyde would have paid "a maximum of £2 million", an average of £1,490 per home. This was looting public property!

Hyde and the New Labour councillors planned a one-sided 'election' to push the transfer through. A £1 million budget financed teams of canvassers, four staffed 'Smart Home' show-houses, fun-days, summer barbecues and Xmas parties, DVDs and glossy leaflets. There were personalised letters from local New Labour MP, Joan Ruddock. The 2006 New Cross ward Green Party council candidate, Alexandra Rae, threw her support behind Hyde. No opposition voice was allowed at 'consultation events'. Some vocal anti-Hyde tenants never made the 'eligible voters' list.

Winning the arguments

BEFORE BALLOTING, the council carefully assessed the likely outcome. RSM, a research company with clients including Barclays, BT and Virgin, charted opinion shifts from October 2006 to August 2007. Their final results showed 44% favoured transfer, 25% opposed, and 30% didn't know. With 'don't knows' evenly splitting in previous transfer ballots in Lewisham, the council predicted a 63.5% to 36.5% Yes victory (Lewisham Mayor & cabinet report, 5th September 2007).

If the RSM findings were accurate, it was a stunning vindication of the Hands Off Our Homes campaign (with only a £400 budget totally financed by tenants' donations) that they convinced all of the 'don't knows'! Actually, there is no question that the campaign made the difference.

Using figures from Hyde's own publications, council reports and government documents, the Hands Off Our Homes campaign produced four leaflets and gave out on the doorstep a 22-page reply to Hyde's 94-page 'offer document'. They organised the only public meeting with both sides invited (the Labour councillors didn't show) and knocked on every door at least twice. Despite all the difficulties, the arguments hit home.

Making a difference

THE SUPPORT given to the campaign by Ian and Chris was vital. To take on the (accurate) argument of tenants who were attracted by Hyde - that Lewisham's New Labour council had neglected homes in New Cross Gate - the campaign had to explain what councillors who really represented working class people could do instead. For decent homes you need decent councillors.

It made it far easier to do so, however, by being able to point to the two Socialist Party councillors, who vote in the council chamber against above-inflation rent rises and for public funding for Decent Homes works, as examples of what should be done.

It re-affirmed one of the most important arguments of the campaign, that council tenants have a weapon that housing association tenants don't - the right to change their landlords by voting for new councillors, including standing for the council themselves. □



Fair access to all Lewisham schools...

THE DECISION taken at July's council meeting not to apply for the new school at Lewisham Bridge to be a community school (see page 16) would mean that five secondary schools in Lewisham would now be able to manage their own admissions, outside of the borough's banding system if they chose. October's council meeting saw a debate on this growing threat to a fair, 'level-field' comprehensive education admissions system in Lewisham's schools.

The Liberal Democrat councillors moved a motion, backed by Ian and Chris, calling for all secondary schools in Lewisham to join the borough's banding system. The Green councillors also backed the motion. Once again, however, the Tories came to New Labour's support, abstaining from the vote to ensure it was defeated.

...Defending council leaseholders

IAN AND Chris submitted their own resolution to the meeting, on the housing transfer ballot in New Cross Gate, calling for leaseholders (council home owners) to be given a vote on New Labour's privatisation plan.

Transferring homes to Hyde would have a big impact not just on council tenants but also on the 500 leaseholders in the area, who would have the management and freehold of their homes handed over to a new, unaccountable landlord. Housing association service charges are generally higher than those charged by councils, for example.

Although leaseholders would be affected, Lewisham's New Labour councillors had decided not to allow them a vote in November's ballot. Leaseholders have no legal right to a vote but many councils have organised a full consultative ballot alongside the legally-binding tenants' ballot. But not Lewisham's New Labour councillors.

And they didn't want to discuss it either, 'talking out' business until a few minutes after 10pm when, as the socialist councillors' motion was about to be debated, the Labour councillors on bloc voted to close the meeting! □

Where did your councillors stand?

For fair access for every pupil to all Lewisham's schools?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Let parents vote on Aske's Monson takeover!

“CALLING THE Socialist Party motions ‘far-left extremism’ shows that New Labour can’t answer what you’re saying”, was the response of one of the 50 or so parents and council tenants who watched the first Lewisham council meeting of 2008 on January 23.

Ian and Chris had submitted a motion calling for a ballot of local primary school parents on New Labour’s plan to hand over Monson primary school in New Cross to the Haberdashers’ Aske’s Hatcham College secondary Academy.

The Socialist Party councillors had opposed this plan since it was first raised in 2006 (see page 9). Aske’s has a separate admissions policy that is used to unfairly select ‘higher band’ pupils who live a long way from the school gates. While Monson would become a ‘feeder’ primary school for Aske’s, pupils from other local primaries would have even less chance of getting into what should be their local secondary school. Handing Monson over to Aske’s would have the potential to seriously divide local parents and schools instead of bringing them together to raise educational opportunities for all - especially if the plan was pushed through against the wishes of local parents.

But the Socialist Party motion, on this occasion, didn’t actually ask the other councillors to oppose the plan. It just asked for parents in the eleven Lewisham primary schools that are as near to Aske’s as Monson is to be given a vote - in other words, parents at Edmund Waller, John Stainer, St James Hatcham, Myatt Garden, Kender, Childeric, Turnham, St Mary Magdalene, Lucas Vale, Ashmead and Monson itself. An individual councillor clearly could have supported the Monson handover plan but also have voted for a parents’ ballot.

All the establishment parties, after all, claim to support ‘parents choice’. Now was their chance. New Labour councillor Robert Massey, however, denounced a ballot as ‘typical far-left extremism’ and the Liberal Democrat group sided with him. The only real argument they had against letting parents vote is that they would probably say No!

One Green councillor rightly pointed out that two ‘public consultations’ had opposed the Aske’s Monson takeover. But then, when it came to the vote, the Greens abstained, along with the Tories and one Labour councillor! Just one Lib Dem ‘rebel’ had the guts to vote with Chris and Ian. □

Narrow defeat for repairs clear-up plan

JANUARY’S MEETING was the first since council tenants in New Cross Gate had voted to reject New Labour’s homes privatisation plans (see page 18). The Socialist councillors’ second motion to the meeting called for a 100-day repairs ‘catch-up’ programme for New Cross Gate homes, now that tenants had voted to stay with the council.

With the council expecting the transfer of homes to Hyde Housing Association to go ahead, a backlog of repairs had built up over the previous 18 months. Hyde had even used the problems this had caused to try and entice tenants to vote for privatisation by themselves talking about a ‘catch-up’ programme. Now that tenants had said No to Hyde, councillors had a duty to act. Clearing up the repairs backlog would have been only the first step to decent homes but it would have made a real difference for tenants.

This proposal should have been more difficult for New Labour to vote down as all the other parties had indicated before the meeting that they would support the plan. The Tories had even submitted a ‘sympathetic amendment’, which Ian and Chris accepted, complaining about repairs problems in other areas of Lewisham. But two councillors were absent ill - so New Labour seized their chance and used their temporary one vote majority to defeat the plan and inflict another vindictive attack on council tenants. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Let parents vote on the Aske’s Monson takeover plan?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green	
Yes	No	No	No	No	
For a repairs ‘catch-up’ programme for New Cross Gate tenants?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green	
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	

Socialist councillors are different

Budget debate on cuts & Decent Homes funding plan

“OUR PROPOSALS are bold and will require a campaign for more resources to meet the needs of the people of Lewisham. But they can be afforded with the resources Lewisham council has today. Cuts can be avoided today. Council tenants’ lives can be transformed from today. Councillors have a choice”.

With these words Chris Flood presented the Socialist Party’s proposals to Lewisham’s annual budget-setting meeting on March 3.

The New Labour councillors had put forward an ‘efficiency package’ which included £4.234 million of job losses, cuts and increased charges. Social worker posts would be cut in adult social care assessment, adolescent mental health, and child protection services. Youth workers would go, including in the youth offending team. The voluntary sector grants budget would be cut and there would be increased charges for adult social care, after-school clubs, burial services, and pest control. New Labour also proposed an above-inflation council rent rise of 5.44%.

The Liberal Democrat and the Greens’ proposals ‘re-ordered’ New Labour’s cuts but did not challenge the idea that, in the words of one Green councillor, “difficult decisions have to be made”. The Greens proposed to sack community wardens to make ‘alternative savings’.

This approach led New Labour councillor, Robert Massey, to praise the “responsible attitude of all the opposition parties - except the Socialist group”. New Labour’s attack was answered by Ian Page, who pointed out that the Socialists’ proposals were merely to use just some of the council’s £10.6m reserves to avoid cuts this year. That wouldn’t solve the problem of funding future years’ spending but it would give the New Labour-led council a ‘breathing space’ to launch a campaign to get more money from what, after all, was their own government! If they didn’t think they could do that, what was the point of being Labour councillors?

New Labour’s budget was eventually passed. The Liberal Democrats joined Ian and Chris in voting against, the Tory councillors voted for, and the Greens abstained.

It’s not that they can’t... it’s that they won’t

THE OTHER budget proposal from the socialist councillors was for Lewisham to borrow £13m to begin ‘Decent Homes standard’ works on council properties in New Cross Gate, after tenants voted to reject New Labour’s plans to sell-off 1,800 homes to Hyde Housing Association (see page 18).

All councils borrow money, at cheaper rates and more securely (because they are public bodies) than commercial organisations like housing associations. £13m would have added just 3% to Lewisham’s overall borrowing plans. By comparison, Chris Flood pointed out, the ruling councillors had borrowed £29.4m in 2006-07 to pay off Hyde’s debts from a Lewisham-Hyde ‘partnership project’ to refurbish just 149 homes on the St John’s estate (see next page).

There were no serious arguments made against the Socialist group’s proposals but they were voted down anyway. This showed that the New Labour councillors want to hand over council homes to housing associations not because this is the best way to improve them but because it is the best way to privatise them.

Once again, in fact, the 2008-09 budget meeting showed it’s not that the New Labour councillors can’t deliver decent council homes or fight the cuts. It’s that they won’t. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Opposed New Labour’s cuts budget?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green	
Yes	No	Yes	No	No	
For a ‘prudential borrowing’ plan to fund Decent Homes works?					
Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green	
Yes	No	No	No	No	

Socialist councillors are different

What the socialist councillors said...

EXTRACTS FROM Chris Flood's speech at the March 2008 council meeting introducing the Socialist Party councillors' budget plans:

THERE ARE two themes in the Socialist Group's budget amendment. Firstly, to separate out the real cuts to services from the efficiency measures that are contained within the mayor's proposed budget savings - and to oppose those cuts.

Secondly, to increase capital spending by £13m to start Decent Homes works on council properties in New Cross Gate, following the clear rejection by council tenants of stock transfer plans in November's ballot.

The New Labour budget

WE HAVE gone through the mayor's proposals and after consulting service users, community groups and trade unionists we have identified 38 budget heading 'savings' - totalling £4.234 million - that we believe will have a real 'frontline impact' in terms of increased charges, job losses and reduced services to the people of Lewisham...

Our proposal is very straightforward. The budget report states that the general fund balances stand at £10.638m, so there are sufficient funds there for the cuts that we've identified not to be made.

It is true, of course, that the chief financial officer has made a 'section 25 statement' arguing that, in her opinion, the balances should remain at the current level.... But we would point to her own words on the question of whether or not it is 'permissible' to use the balances in the way that we propose: "There is an opportunity cost of holding non-earmarked balances and it is ultimately a judgement [for councillors] about the benefits of maintaining this resource rather than applying it".

That is what we are doing tonight. Our judgement is that these cuts shouldn't be made. And that we should use the balances not to make them.

Future budgets

THAT APPROACH clearly has an impact on future budgets. That's why we are also proposing a budget amendment that: "The mayor should bring forward proposals for a public campaign to persuade the government to reverse the real terms cuts in grants announced for Lewisham for 2009/10 and 2010/11".

It is important to make the point that, under a New Labour-led council, in the eleventh year of a New Labour government, the people of Lewisham are facing the prospect of real terms cuts in funding for council services for the next two years.

This is not because the money isn't there. The government has spent over £7 billion to date on its 'wars of choice' in Iraq and Afghanistan... The government made available, as we all know, £55 billion to underwrite Northern Rock. Jumping ahead to our

proposal to finance Decent Homes works in New Cross Gate, if the government gave 20p to Lewisham council for every £1,000 that's gone to Northern Rock, every council tenant in that area could have new bathrooms, kitchens and windows tomorrow.

It is not as if Britain is a poor country. It was recently revealed that nearly a third of Britain's top 700 companies paid no corporation tax in 2005-06 and a further third paid less than £10m. The money is there - it is just not being made available to spend on the public services that we need.

Coming back to the revenue budget, even within this year's local government settlement, Lewisham has been hit by the government. Lewisham's 'formula grant' this year was a below inflation 2%, compared to a national average of 3.6%, and other grants were cut. In cash terms, that means Lewisham was 'short-changed' by £3.8m, not far short of the cuts we are opposing.

We are not asking the mayor, 'Sir Steve' Bullock, to copy John Lennon, who handed back his OBE in 1970 in protest at the Vietnam war. But we are asking him, and his fellow New Labour councillors, not to make the real cuts in Lewisham's services that they are proposing. To use some of the council's balances to avoid these cuts. And to launch a public campaign, including linking with other London councils who are also being hit, to reverse the government's real term cuts to council spending.

Decent Homes funding plan

OUR PROPOSALS for the revenue budget are aimed at stopping real cuts to services. But our proposal to increase capital spending by £13m to start Decent Homes works in New Cross Gate aims to improve the daily life of eighteen hundred families in this area...

Councils can undertake 'prudential borrowing', also known as 'unsupported borrowing'. The mayor's proposed 2008-2011 capital programme includes 'unsupported borrowing' of £4.397m. Our amendment proposes to increase this by £13m.

This is not 'reckless' borrowing. It takes the prudential borrowing element of Lewisham's capital programme, for example, to much the same level as the Labour-controlled Tower Hamlets council in East London.

And it is certainly less than the £29.426m 'unsupported borrowing' the mayor made in 2006 when he agreed to effectively take on the debts of Hyde Housing Association on the re-build and refurbishment of 149 properties on the St John's estate...

Our proposals are bold and will require a campaign for more resources to meet the needs of the people of Lewisham. But they can be afforded with the resources Lewisham has today. Cuts can be avoided today. Council tenants lives can be transformed from today. Councillors have a choice. That is why we are moving our budget amendment. ”

Standing up for teachers



APRIL'S COUNCIL meeting took place the evening before what was to be the first national teachers' strike since the days of Margaret Thatcher.

Teachers were protesting against what was effectively a pay cut, after annual pay awards had been held below inflation since 2005. When 50% of new teachers were leaving the profession within three years of starting their teaching careers, education was being threatened by the erosion of teachers' pay and conditions.

To show support for the teachers the Socialist Party councillors proposed a motion calling on the government "to re-consider the proposed pay award". This would have made Lewisham the first council in England to back the teachers' case, sending a powerful message to the government.

The Liberal Democrats, however, moved an amendment deleting this call and replacing it with a request to ministers to "address the issue of teacher workload" which, they argued, was having the biggest impact on teacher morale.

Ian Page, replying to the debate, agreed that teachers' workload was a vital issue. But "it wasn't rocket science - you don't actually need that much of an education - to see that deleting the clear call to re-consider the pay award" was siding with New Labour.

The Liberal Democrats' real attitude was shown when their amendment was defeated. With the Green councillors supporting the Socialist Party motion, the 16 Liberal Democrats could have voted to defeat the 19 New Labour councillors still present in the council chamber. Instead they abstained, with their education spokesperson, in the week when another bank bail-out was announced, saying that there was no money for teachers' pay! The establishment parties really are all the same. □

Move to save Kender housing office narrowly lost

IN THE spring Lewisham Homes announced plans to close the Kender Housing Office in Queens Road - even though 86% of local residents who had responded to the official 'consultation' letters opposed the plan!

Instead of a local housing office, they proposed that services would be provided from the Pepys Area Office at Eddystone Tower in Deptford. The official council report admitted that this would "have an impact on those with disabilities or conditions which limit their ability to travel". [Source: Mayor & cabinet report, 28 May 2008] And then there were those who have to rely on public transport, the elderly, and those with young children.

The Lewisham Homes ALMO proposed this cut but the final decision was in the hands of Lewisham's councillors. So the Socialist Party councillors presented a resolution to the June council meeting for the Kender office to be kept open, backed up by a Hands Off Our Homes campaign petition signed by local residents.

The New Labour councillors claimed it was too expensive to provide services from the Kender office. But Ian and Chris pointed to a council report showing that the Housing Revenue Account - where tenants' rent money goes - had an operating surplus of £300,000 in 2007. [Source: Mayor & cabinet report, 25th June 2008] This compared to the council's official estimate that it cost £75,600 to "maintain and operate the New Cross office facilities". The money was there. They also pointed out that the closure plan was originally based on the assumption that 1,800 council properties in the area would be transferred to Hyde Housing Association, which hadn't happened. That rent income would still be coming in, and tenants still needed a local housing service.

Once again, however, the Tories abstained, allowing New Labour to narrowly defeat the Socialist Party motion. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Support teachers' pay protest?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Keep Kender housing office open?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Say No to hospital cuts & closures

IN THE spring of 2008 the South East London NHS started a 'consultation' on plans, entitled *A Picture of Health*, to 're-organise' hospital services in the region. The consultation leaflets tried to re-assure. The plans to 're-organise' hospital services, they said, were being driven only by 'clinical needs'. But that wasn't the *real picture*...

The *Picture of Health* blueprint gave three 'options' for hospital cuts. All proposed scrapping the Accident and Emergency (A&E), maternity and children's inpatients units at Sidcup's Queen Mary's Hospital. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich and the Princess Royal Hospital in Bromley would lose planned inpatients and day surgery units to become 'specialist hospitals'. Two of the three 'options' for Lewisham Hospital would close A&E, maternity and children's inpatients services there.

A picture of cuts & privatisation

WERE THERE any clinical arguments for these plans? Far from having too many A&E units, South East

London services were already overstretched. Attendances at A&E had grown 28% between 2002 and 2006, compared to a 13% average for England. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital would be expected to increase its emergency admissions by 40% under the plans - even though it often diverted ambulances to Queen Mary's because of lack of beds.

Bed occupancy rates in South East London's hospitals were already above the recommended maximum level for the safe handling of MRSA and other hospital-acquired infections. Yet the *Picture of Health* plans would cut at least one in ten beds.

In reality the plans were about cutting public spending and getting the NHS ready for private companies to profit from our health services. The glossy leaflets said that South East London hospitals were operating at a £400,000 a week 'deficit'. But they didn't say that this is actually less than the extra weekly costs of 'private finance initiative' (PFI) schemes at the Queen Elizabeth, Lewisham and Bromley hospitals (see box). Private profit was being

put before public services!

One simple solution to the 'deficit' would be to take the PFI companies into public ownership and use the money saved to keep services open. After all, by making super-profits from taxpayers' money, these private companies are threatening our NHS. If banks can be nationalised, why can't PFI companies also be taken over?

But none of the establishment parties would suggest this. They all support the Tory 'free market system', which puts corporate profits first. And it's our public services that suffer.

Lewisham Hospital A&E saved!

THE *Picture of Health* consultation went on into the summer and the Socialist Party councillors launched a petition opposing all the 'options' presented in the plans. The aim was to build up public pressure to push the council to use any legal powers it had to ensure that the region's hospitals had sufficient funds to maintain and improve all the services they were then providing.

The chance to do so came at the council's Healthier Communities Select Committee meeting on October 9th. Chris Flood is a member of this committee and he presented a motion to the meeting to 'refer back' the *Picture of Health* plans to the government, which councils are allowed to do.

Incredibly, however, both the New Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors opposed this call, arguing that the slight modifications to the plan made over the summer - to 'only' close night-time A&E services at Lewisham hospital rather than the whole department - were all that could be achieved.

The planned cutback in A&E (and other services) at Queen Mary's Hospital was in itself unacceptable, as A&E services in South East London were already overstretched. But for Lewisham councillors to accept the closure of night-time A&E services at Lewisham Hospital as well was amazing. 'Don't have a heart attack before 8am' seemed to be their message!

In the end, however, public pressure won! In 2009 the Health Secretary overturned the proposal to reduce Lewisham Hospital's A&E opening hours or cut emergency surgery services. This shows the power of public campaigning - and the benefit of having Socialist Party councillors there to put the case for public services. □



Chris Flood campaigning against the *Picture of Health* cuts.

Defending community health services

EVERYBODY COULD agree with one of the *Picture of Health* report arguments that there should be more community health services and care delivered as close to home as possible. That means co-ordinating services with local councils. But when Lewisham council discussed its budget plans for 2008-09 in March (see page 21) New Labour proposed to cut Adult Social Care assessment staff, Children and Adolescent Mental Health services, and social workers based at Lewisham Hospital. The Socialist Party councillors moved an alternative budget which kept these services. The New Labour, Tory and Lib Dem councillors voted against, while the Greens abstained. □

PFI - Profiteering From Illness

THERE WAS no clinical case for any of the cuts in hospital services proposed in the *Picture of Health* plans. But even the details of *where* the cuts were to fall were being dictated by commercial considerations!

One report, buried away amongst all the glossy publicity, let slip the real reason why Queen Mary Hospital would be hardest hit - because it was "the site where there is the greatest scope to reduce fixed costs". If services were to be cut at Queen Mary, it said, "then the surplus estate [buildings and land] can be sold or leased". [Source: Implications of fixed costs and PFI schemes for service redesign in SE London, April 2007]

In contrast, the report admitted, both Queen Elizabeth and Bromley hospitals were tied to massive Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract payments for between 30 and 35 years. Bromley hospital has to pay out £12.2 million a year more than it would do if private companies weren't involved, and Queen Elizabeth £8.9 million more. Because they were locked into these contracts and Queen Mary wasn't, this made it easier - and more profitable - to close services at Queen Mary's and sell off the land.

How can they say with a straight face that New Labour and Tory market policies put patients' needs ahead of private profit? □

Fair pay for council workers

OVER THE summer, 600,000 local government employees across the country took part in a two-day protest strike against a pay offer which, with an official inflation rate at that time of 3.8%, was really a pay cut. The Socialist Party councillors pledged their full support for the trade unions' call for a fair pay settlement for council workers.

Lewisham had a particular importance in this dispute - the mayor, Sir Steve Bullock, was head of the national local government employers' Human Resources Panel, and in a powerful position to make sure council workers got a fair deal.

At the September council meeting therefore, the Socialist Party councillors presented a motion on the local government workers' pay negotiations, which had been re-opened after the strike. Pointing out that over a quarter of a million council workers earn less than £6.50 an hour, the motion called for Lewisham council to add its weight to the unions' view that the re-negotiated pay offer should as a *minimum* not fall below the inflation rate.

But only the Green councillors backed the Socialist Party motion! This is clear warning of what lies ahead - when given the chance to vote for or against pay cuts, the establishment parties came down against the workers. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Opposing cuts to Lewisham A&E?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	Not on the committee	Yes

Defend community health services?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	No

Back fair pay for council workers?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Another setback for New Labour's homes privatisation plans

NOVEMBER SAW another victory by Lewisham tenants in the battle against the privatisation of council homes. The New Labour councillors finally called off their efforts to hand over properties in the New Cross Gate area to Hyde Housing Association.

Last December their plans were defeated in a ballot, with 55% of tenants voting No to privatisation (see page 18). This covered 1,820 properties, one third of them in Telegraph Hill ward.

Rather than accepting tenants' clear verdict that they wanted decent standard council homes, not privatisation, New Labour were determined to try again. Every housing transfer ballot lost is a blow to their pro-market agenda. And it was a double blow in New Cross Gate because the Socialist Party councillors were prominent in the Hands Off Our Homes campaign for a No vote.

So in the spring Lewisham's mayor, Sir Steve Bullock, announced a new privatisation plan for 660 New Cross Gate homes in parts of the original transfer area where there had been majority support for Hyde. New Labour councillors were confident that, this time, they would get a victory.

To build momentum a letter was sent to every householder by Sir Steve making the false claim, once again, that Lewisham didn't have the funds for Decent Homes improvements - even though they had voted down a funding plan at the March 2008 budget-setting meeting (see page 21).

This was followed by an aggressive 'opinion polling' consultation where tenants were asked whether they wanted "to remain with Lewisham with uncertain prospects of gaining the necessary funding" or "transfer to Hyde Housing Association with

guaranteed funding for a higher standard of work"! Having shown, they hoped, 'public support' for transfer by this loaded 'consultation', they would then organise another, legally-required, transfer ballot.

A major shift in opinion

BUT IT was not to be. A street by street breakdown of the previous year's vote showed a 60% to 40% majority then for Hyde in the proposed new transfer area. But in a major turnaround in opinion, this time 51% told the polling organisation that they wanted to remain as council tenants. This did not "represent a sound platform from which to launch a second transfer", the New Labour councillors and Hyde forlornly concluded [Mayor & Cabinet report, 19 November 2008].

Hands Off Our Homes campaigners found that the changed economic circumstances since the 2007 ballot, when only Northern Rock had hit the buffers, made it easier to explain the dangers of privatisation. One housing association with properties in Lewisham, Ujima HA, had recently gone bust, showing that housing associations offer less security than council housing. Many people signed the petition against a new ballot who had supported transfer a year earlier.

But the arguments still needed to be won. Lewisham council spent more proportionately in New Cross Gate promoting privatisation than anywhere else in the borough. In the comparably-sized Grove Park area, for example, they spent £637,000, against £1.4 million in New Cross Gate - and yet here they were defeated, twice! That they were was another example of the power of public campaigning, and the importance of having socialist councillors to back up the fight for decent public services. □

More New Labour budget cuts

THE NOVEMBER council meeting discussed proposals from New Labour for more budget cuts, this time of £6.449 million.

Over 60 jobs were to go, including posts in community drugs education; adult social care duty teams dealing with enquiries and day service staff for older clients; and vehicle enforcement, responsible for removing abandoned cars. Charges would be increased for many services, including early education sessions and nursery places at the Margaret Sandra Day centre. The cuts were passed because a Tory councillor abstained. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Opposing £6.449 million cuts to services?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Where do the Greens stand?

TOWARDS THE end of 2008 the story broke that the membership records of the far-right British National Party (BNP) had been leaked to the press. There was a Lewisham angle - one of the Green Party candidates who stood in Telegraph Hill ward in the 2006 local elections appeared on the list.

Consequently, when the news came out, Lewisham Socialist Party was asked to comment. Aware that the list, leaked by disgruntled BNP officials, did not necessarily imply support for the far-right party, before we answered media queries we contacted the individual named, who informed us that he had never been a supporter of the BNP or their racist ideas.

We accepted his assurance but, as there were others on the list who had been Green Party members who were now confirmed BNP supporters - including a former Essex councillor and one Green ex-parliamentary candidate - we also wrote to the Lewisham Greens for their views. The Green councillors' group leader, Darren Johnson, replied, saying that he was convinced that the individual concerned had been "the victim of a malicious prank" and had given "no indication whatsoever that he shared the obnoxious views of the BNP". That is what we then said in our public comments.

The Green councillors' mixed record

BUT A wider question had been raised. Darren Johnson conceded that their ex-candidate, who had no campaigning record in Telegraph Hill before the 2006 elections, "has had no active involvement in the Green Party" since. So even if, as it appeared, he was not sympathetic to the BNP's poisonous ideas, why did Lewisham's Greens think that he would have been a better representative for Telegraph Hill than the sitting Socialist Party councillors, Ian Page and Chris Flood?

The Greens stood three candidates in Telegraph Hill ward in 2006 against the Socialist Party (allowing New Labour to slip in and pick up the third seat) but only one candidate in other, New Labour-held wards in Lewisham. What does this say about the Greens?

The Socialist Party and the Green councillors have often voted together against all the other parties, opposing, for example, the *Picture of Health* plans to cut Lewisham A&E services (see page 24), or in support of the teachers' pay protest (page 23). But the Greens have not always backed the socialist councillors' proposals to resist the establishment parties' pro-market agenda.

In a 'hung council', with no one party having an overall majority, the Greens have sided with New Labour, or abstained to help give them a majority, on a number of key votes. These included votes for cuts in council services (see page 12); against the re-zoning of London Bridge during the East London Line shutdown (page 15); opposing elections to the Lewisham Homes board (page 10); not supporting a parents' ballot on the Monson school takeover (page 20); and insisting on the decant of pupils from Lewisham Bridge primary (page 28).



Socialist Party MEP Joe Higgins. The Socialist Party has gained support in Ireland while the Greens in government have implemented massive cuts.

Resisting the pressure for pro-market policies

THIS VACILLATION by the Greens is not accidental. Councillors who stand out are put under extreme pressure from the establishment party politicians, backed up by senior council officials, to 'be realistic', to accept government 'guidance', and follow the logic of pro-market policies that always put big business interests first. Because the Green Party doesn't have a clear alternative to the capitalist 'free market' system, they are often unable to resist.

And not just on Lewisham council. In Ireland, for example, the Green Party is participating in a coalition government that is carrying out the deepest cuts in public services, wages, pension rights, and benefits in Irish history. One result is that in last year's European elections the Socialist Party in Ireland had its first Member of the European Parliament (MEP) elected - Joe Higgins, in Dublin - while the Greens lost their representation.

The Socialist Party will continue to co-operate with the Greens when we can, including electoral agreements where possible. But by their showing in Lewisham there is no reason to think that the Greens here wouldn't go the same way as their European counterparts, and participate in a pro-capitalist government implementing social cuts, if they ever became a significant force in British politics. It's the Socialist Party that's really different. □

Another New Labour-Tory cuts coalition

THE EARLY months of 2009 saw, once again, intense discussions on what budget the council would agree for the 2009-10 financial year.

The November 2008 council meeting had narrowly agreed 'first round cuts' of £6.4 million (see page 26). It had also received the news that, in the same government 'pre-budget report' that announced the one-year reduction in VAT, New Labour had confirmed that Lewisham would face real term cuts in government grants for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 financial years. Meanwhile, showing that there is still money there for big business interests, alongside more bail outs for the banks the government announced that rules for taxing UK-based multinationals would be relaxed!

Playing politics with children's education

AT THE council meeting on April 1 the Socialist Party councillors presented an emergency motion on Lewisham Bridge primary school.

Following the decision to build a new 'through school' for 3-16 year olds on the Lewisham Bridge site (see page 16), children at the primary school were scheduled to be moved to a temporary building, for two years, after Easter.

But planning permission for the new school had still not been granted. The Environment Agency and other bodies had criticised the council's plans, with Thames Water warning there were inadequate water supplies for the much larger proposed new school.

The Socialist Party councillors argued that moving children to a temporary site, certainly before these issues were resolved, was wrong. With so many uncertainties it was unacceptable to move children as young as four, requiring families to put them on a bus every morning, to go to a 'temporary' school for two years.

The motion argued to halt the school 'decant' until all the investigations needed were done. Nothing could be done with the existing site for the next few months anyway, so why move the school now?

But the New Labour councillors were determined to push ahead with their plans, without even discussing the serious issues raised. Backed by the Greens and the Tories, they voted to move to the next item on the council agenda to avoid a debate on the motion - playing politics with children's schooling. □

Spinning the facts

THE COUNCIL meeting in March to set the 2009/10 budget faced proposals for new cuts of £4.236 million in council services and confirming the cuts agreed in November. The Socialist Party councillors voted, with other opposition parties, to refer the *whole budget* back to the mayor. But New Labour managed to get their budget passed on the casting vote of the Conservative Party councillor, Barry Anderson.

Following the council meeting New Labour put a leaflet round Telegraph Hill ward claiming that the socialist councillors had voted against *increased* spending by *opposing* the mayor's budget! They claimed, for example, that Ian and Chris opposed spending £30,000 "to make sure elderly residents get help and the benefits they are entitled to". But they didn't mention that Labour's budget proposed to *cut* £225,000 from the duty teams dealing with Adult Social Care enquiries from the public and service users; *cut* £262,000 from the supported housing and care budget for the elderly; *cut* £31,000 by reducing day service staff for older clients; *cut* £70,000 by reducing supervisory posts for home care; and start 'consultations' to *cut* £140,000 from Meals on Wheels. So who was really supporting services for the elderly?

It wasn't quite the same as claiming that Saddam Hussein could drop weapons of mass destruction on London 'in 45 minutes' but it was typical New Labour lies and spin - this time, trying to hide another example of a New Labour-Tory cuts coalition. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Oppose more budget cuts?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Delay the decant of Lewisham Bridge until planning issues solved?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	No

Socialist councillors are different

Temporary reprieve for Lewisham Bridge primary school

HAVING DEFEATED Chris and Ian's attempt to at least suspend the decant of Lewisham Bridge, the Labour councillors' plans to push ahead with the demolition of the school hit a new snag at the end of April - the building was awarded a grade II listing by English Heritage!

The decant had already started, with pupils being taken by bus to a temporary site at a cost of £900 a day. Parents and children had to get up at least an hour earlier and then return later in the day - something the council expected them to do for a further two years.

Campaigners, including some parents, started a rooftop protest on the day the bussing started, demanding that Lewisham Bridge should stay as it is and that the council should look for another site to build the much-needed new secondary school. A protest march, with teachers' support, was organised to keep up the pressure on councillors.

A primary places problem

PARENTS WERE understandably angry. Their children's school was under threat because New Labour wanted to replace it with a school for children from the age of three up to 16. But firstly there is little convincing research to show that such 'all-age' schools work, especially when squeezed onto a site presently occupied by a primary school with half the proposed pupil numbers. It would leave play areas and room sizes below government recommendations.

In addition, there were growing signs of an imminent shortage of primary school places in the borough. How would cutting Lewisham Bridge to just one form of entry help, just as hundreds of additional properties are being built in the surrounding streets?

So why wouldn't New Labour admit they had got it wrong? The reason was because the plan for Lewisham Bridge was part of a wider plan to replace local authority comprehensive schooling with unaccountable trusts and academies.

The planned 'all-age' school would be a 'foundation' school that can set its own admissions policy, not a community school (see page 16). At the same time, the New Labour councillors were promoting a plan to give away Deptford Green school, Addey & Stanhope and Crossways Sixth Form to a 'Trust' controlled by the Goldsmiths University board (and a possible "additional partner" from the private sector). This Trust too would be able to adopt its own admissions policy, hold the land and school assets, and replace

governors elected by parents with its own appointees.

All these plans, in other words, were further steps to dividing education in Lewisham into competing federations, with private bodies putting their interests first instead of working together to ensure every child gets the decent education they deserve.

Another New Labour fiasco

THE SOCIALIST Party councillors presented a motion to the May council meeting to put off any demolition of Lewisham Bridge school, at least until councillors did a proper review of whether there would be enough primary school places for local children if the school was knocked down.

Given the new uncertainty created by the English Heritage listing, the motion also called for an end to the 'decant' to the temporary school, at least while all the planning issues were unresolved. Otherwise, as Ian and Chris argued, the children could remain in a 'temporary' site for years. Surely it would be better to move them back to the old site until a clear decision could be made? Incredibly no other party was prepared to back the motion.

Eventually however, the council had to face reality and brought the children back to Lewisham Bridge in early 2010. A council report around the same time also confirmed Chris and Ian's warnings that Lewisham faces a primary places crisis in the next couple of years. But will that stop New Labour from pushing on with their plans?

The whole fiasco around Lewisham Bridge began because New Labour councillors wouldn't listen to parents' demands for a 'New School for New Cross' to meet the shortage of secondary school places in the north of the borough. Now they risk aggravating a coming shortage of primary places. All because, once again, New Labour, and the Tories and Liberal Democrats too, put their 'market-model' approach to education ahead of children's real needs. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Halt Lewisham Bridge demolition plans until primary places review?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	No

Socialist councillors are different

Success for the Stop the Strip campaign

DURING 2008 a New Cross publican whose pub had been going downhill for some time decided to turn it into the White Hart 'Gentlemen's Club'. Lewisham council initially rejected the licensing application but the publican appealed to the courts and won. Unfortunately, under New Labour's 2003 Licensing Act, lap-dancing clubs only require a premises licence just like a cafe.

In response local residents, backed by the Socialist Party councillors, organised the Stop the Strip campaign, which successfully held a large protest of over 100 people in May.

Ian and Chris made it clear that, when high street businesses are closing in the recession, we don't want our communities littered with empty shops and strip joints. Women workers are particularly vulnerable in the recession, as they are more likely to be on part-time, casual contracts with fewer employment rights. Young people are also hit hard, with students finding it harder to get part-time jobs. Because of New Labour's tuition fees and the lack of student grants, women students already make up a large proportion of lap-dancers. Is that what we want for young women students at Goldsmiths? Women need decent jobs on decent pay.

Local residents also felt threatened. Evidence shows that when such clubs open in new areas, attacks on women increase. Lewisham already had one of the highest rates of sexual assault on women, the sixth highest rape figures, and is eighth highest for all other sexual offences.

Having been defeated in the courts under the licensing laws, was there anything else the council could do? Ian and Chris drew up plans for a council motion for a compulsory purchase order (CPO) on the White Hart, enabling the building to be put to better use for the community. After all, a motion had been passed before for a CPO on a Big Yellow Self-Storage Company site in south Lewisham which was seen as a blight on the area. Why couldn't the council's powers be used to stop a lap-dancing bar?

But even before this move was made, community campaigning had once again paid off. In July the White Hart returned to being run as a normal bar - a great success for the 'Stop the Strip' campaign. □

Keep Our NHS Public - the Waldron Centre plan

DESPITE OPPOSITION from patients and local GPs, the summer months saw Lewisham's Primary Care Trust (PCT) push ahead with proposals that will open up a market for a 'GP-led Health Centre' in the Waldron Health Centre in New Cross.

The PCT's glossy 'consultation' document, *Improving Access to Primary Care*, tried to hide what was at stake. Only at the end did it finally pose the question: 'Are you privatising services?'. The answer, that private companies will be able to 'bid' to be "the new provider of the GP-led health centre", shows that 'profit-led centres' would be a far better description of what was on offer.

A big concern for patients was that the PCT's proposal did not offer continuity of care, which is what people with more complex health problems need. Private sector involvement will lead to a less efficient, less fair and poorer quality NHS. And local people had no say on this - the 'consultation' did not allow patients to reject a potential private sector-led health centre proposal.

On Lewisham council's Health Select Committee, Chris Flood opposed the PCT's plan. If we are going to extend GP hours, he argued, then let's allow the current GPs to do so. In fact the GPs at the Waldron Centre had been only too willing to extend their existing services, offer more accessible hours and, in doing so, continue to provide quality care for their patients. But the PCT turned down their offer, because it had been told that it had to tender for any additional primary care services and offer an 'alternative provider' contract! This shows that it was not patients' needs that were at the heart of the PCT plan but the government's determination to create an NHS 'market' in primary care.

The New Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors wouldn't back Chris, however, and a chance was lost to stop this potentially dangerous plan. □

Where did your councillors stand?

Reject 'profit-led' health centres?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	Not on the committee	Yes

Socialist councillors are different

Why should we pay for their crisis?

More delays on Decent Homes funding

DECEMBER'S COUNCIL meeting held a debate on the government's decision to withhold £150 million of Decent Homes funding from 12 'Arms Length Management' Organisations' (ALMOs) until 2011/12, including Lewisham Homes. This decision was taken despite the mayor, 'Sir Steve' Bullock, according to the official council report, lobbying "the minister privately on this matter, both in person and via direct correspondence, in order to press the case for Lewisham"!

The Liberal Democrats presented a motion deploring New Labour's failure to achieve Decent Homes through the ALMO. But this was completely hypocritical. The Liberal Democrat party leader, Nick Clegg, had just recently called for 'savage cuts' in public spending. And the Lib Dems had voted with New Labour in 2006 to set up the Lewisham Homes ALMO as 'the best way' to get Decent Homes funding, without even giving tenants and leaseholders a chance to vote on the plan! (see page 6) None of the establishment parties are prepared to fight for decent standard council homes. □

NOVEMBER'S COUNCIL meeting saw a debate on New Labour's proposals for £4 million 'first round cuts' in Lewisham's 2010-11 council budget. The cuts included big reductions in the parks budget and benefit services (and even above-inflation increases in cremation charges). In total, at least 50 jobs will be lost. The package was voted through by the New Labour and Tory councillors, with the Liberal Democrats and Greens abstaining. Only the Socialist Party councillors voted against.

There then followed a debate on how to deal with the funding crisis that will face councils in future years. This centred around a motion moved by New Labour calling for cross-party support for the mayor's budget cuts and his plan to freeze council tax. The Socialist Party councillors moved an amendment, accepting that council tax shouldn't be hiked up - why should we pay 'more for less' to compensate for government cuts? But at the same time the socialist councillors' motion called on "the mayor and council to launch a campaign to demand the necessary extra funding from the government to prevent any cuts to the council's budget".

Stand up for Lewisham

WHY COULDN'T the council ask the government for enough money to ensure there are no cuts? It is a fact that Lewisham's grant has not kept pace with inflation in recent years and has also fallen behind other councils. This followed a change in the way the government calculates the funds that go to councils.

In 2007 the difference between what Lewisham got and what it would have got if its grant had been increased in line with councils outside London was £2.23m. In 2008 it was £3.8m and in 2009 Lewisham was again 'short-changed' by £1.84m. That comes to a total of £7.87m - at least if they demanded that money back, it would be a start.

But only a start. The council's own budget report predicts that Lewisham will be faced with cuts of £50-£60 million over the three years from 2011. Services will be slashed - unless we fight back.

Cuts are not inevitable

BUT IS there really a choice? That's what the other parties' councillors say. The government deficit - largely the result of the bank bail-outs and the impact of the economic crisis - will be £178 billion this year, the worst since war-time. This can't go on, they say, we all have to 'tighten our belts'.

But it is just not true the money isn't there for public services. Ask the city bankers who created this crisis in the first place. The £59.4 billion paid in city bonuses in the last five years alone is more, for example, than one year's national schools and house-building budgets combined. Yet even this year they are still taking home billions in bonuses.

The 2009 Sunday Times 'Rich List' shows that the 1,000 wealthiest people in Britain own £258 billion - far more than the public debt. There are 362,000 'high net worth individuals' in Britain who own over \$1m on top of their housing assets. Its not our pay, pensions, jobs and services which could easily be 'belt-tightened'!

Yet when the Socialist Party councillors tried to move their amendment at November's council meeting, the New Labour councillor chairing the meeting ruled it 'out of order', so scared were the Labour group of a proper debate on what to do about the cuts to come. Only public pressure will save our jobs and services. □

Socialist councillors are different

Preparing to fight the 'savage cuts' to come

IN JUNE 2007, just a year before the worst financial crisis since the 1930s, Gordon Brown got up to speak at a banquet of City fat cats at Mansion House. "This is an era that history will record as a new golden age", he told them. "I want to thank all of you for what you are achieving". The "creativity and ingenuity" of the City of London's financial sector shows, he argued, that "light-touch regulation, a competitive tax environment [for the 'banksters' not for us!] and flexibility" are the basis of a successful economy. When New Labour came to power some people "favoured a regulatory crackdown", he said. "I believe we were right not to go down that road".

Really, what is the difference in philosophy between New Labour and the Tories? Margaret Thatcher's 1986 'big bang' deregulation of the City set the basis for the explosion of speculative profit-grabbing that preceded the current crisis. But as the above speech shows, New Labour swallowed wholesale her idea that 'the market' can solve all problems.

But is the capitalist 'free market' system really the most efficient way of 'creating wealth'? One estimate by the IMF is that the world economic recession wiped over \$1.5 trillion dollars off annual world output in 2009 alone. This is equivalent to 'losing' all the goods and services produced in one year in Australia and Belgium combined. Surely this can not be the most 'efficient and dynamic' means available to humankind of organising the production of the things we need?

In this crisis governments throughout the world have been forced to bail out the banks to stop a complete meltdown. But they still see the public sector as being a subsidiary to the market, 'stepping in' when the private sector fails.

This approach, however, still leaves the power to determine the fate of economy and society in the hands of a few billionaires. Only fundamental socialist change - bringing the big banks and giant corporations into democratic public ownership - could enable the economy to be democratically planned, to be run by all to meet the needs of all rather than the profits of the few.

It doesn't have to be like this

WHEN IAN Page was elected as a Labour councillor in 1990 his membership card had printed on it the old Clause Four of Labour's constitution, adopted in 1918: "To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable

distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service".

The language may be dated but Clause Four expressed the hopes that lay behind the formation of the Labour Party by the trade unionists, socialists, co-operative members, early environmentalists and women's votes campaigners who set it up over one hundred years ago. 'Old Labour', it is true, had too many MPs and councillors who ended up putting the interests of big business first, but it was seen as 'our party' by millions of working class and middle class people too, who felt they could hold their representatives to account.

But that time has gone. Tony Blair abolished Clause Four in 1995 (when Ian Page was expelled from the Labour Party) and removed all possibilities for trade unions and ordinary party members to have a real say in deciding 'New Labour' policy. Today, who trusts any of the establishment parties and politicians, completely detached as they are from the lives of ordinary working people (as the MPs expenses scandals have so graphically shown)? Once again we need to build an independent working class political voice. The Socialist Party works nationally and locally with trade unionists, community campaigners and others in support of all steps towards that goal.

This report on the activities of Ian Page and Chris Flood since the 2006 local elections has shown, we hope, that the Socialist Party councillors strive at all times to stand up for working class people, our jobs and public services. If you're fed up with politics for the wealthy then get active with the Socialist Party and join the fight for a society organised in the interests of the millions and not the millionaires.



Tories and New Labour: more in common than you'd think

Socialist councillors are different

At a glance Where did your councillors stand?

2006

For a new school... and save Ladywell pool?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Support tenants' vote on setting up the Lewisham Homes ALMO?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	Yes

For a public debate on the Aske's Monson takeover plan?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Democracy for the Lewisham Homes 'ALMO'?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	No

2008

Let parents vote on the Aske's Monson takeover plan?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	No

Support teachers' pay protest?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Keep Kender housing office open?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Opposing cuts to Lewisham A&E?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	Not on the committee	Yes

2007

Protecting adult social care services from cuts?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	No

For a new referendum on the 'one-person rules' mayor system?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Re-zone London Bridge during the East London Line closure?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

For the new school to be a community school?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

For fair access for every pupil to all Lewisham's schools?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

2009

Delay the decant of Lewisham Bridge until planning issues solved?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	Yes	No	No

Reject 'profit-led' health centres?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	Not on the committee	Yes

Halt Lewisham Bridge demolition plans until primary places review?

Socialist Party	New Labour	Lib Dem	Tory	Green
Yes	No	No	No	No

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