

Militant

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The answer to LCC

Dirty ammunition for Labour's witch-hunters

"NOT WITH a bang, but a whimper!" This will be the verdict of labour movement activists on the "explosive evidence" of "abuses and corruption" presented by the Labour Co-ordinating Committee to the NEC inquiry on Liverpool District Labour Party. The LCC's "political bomb" was previewed in the *Guardian* (22 January), which unlike the DLP's own leaders was given advance copies.

But when published in part in the *Tribune* (24 January) it was immediately clear that the LCC's "evidence" is in reality a venomous political attack on the policies and campaigning record of Liverpool DLP—disguised by a tawdry catalogue of whingeing grievances, petty criticism and spiteful political recrimination. Few people in Liverpool know who they are. Neither in their own dossier nor in the *Tribune* report do they identify themselves.

The LCC is a micro-groupuscule on Merseyside. On the political differences which they have raised over the last period—and have every right to raise—they have been overwhelmingly defeated. Among one of the most radicalised and active sections of the working class in Britain, the LCC, which is based on white-collar and middle-class circles, has no support at all for its policies on voluntary sector housing, on positive discrimination, on capitalisation, etc.

On other vital issues, such as the campaign strategy, where the LCC initially supported the council's fight but attempted to find 'an easy way out' when the struggle reached a decisive stage, the LCC remained a tiny, uninfluential minority. In mass DLP meetings which debated the budget strategy and tactics the LCC and their allies never received more than a couple of dozen votes.

But as soon as the immediate budget crisis was resolved through the package endorsed by the DLP on the 22 November, the LCC joined the unholy alliance determined to take revenge on the DLP for the magnificent struggle which they waged in defence of council services and jobs.

This alliance, on the one side, embraced the Tories, Liberals, the SDP, and other capitalist interests who were terrified by the spectre of a mass workers' movement in opposition to cuts. On the other side, it included right wing Labour leaders and trade union general secretaries sorely discomfited by a campaign on Merseyside which highlighted their own inability to organise an effective struggle on behalf of their members.

Significantly, the LCC has adopted and re-hashed many of the complaints and so-called 'evidence' from the Liverpool Liberals. Their venom has always been directed at the key gains made by Labour since taking over the council in 1983: reversal of privatisation, the strengthening of local authority

trade unions, and the establishment of elements of workers' control.

Many of the LCC's allegations of 'abuses', 'corruption', 'patronage'—not substantiated but based on misrepresentation and fabrication—are linked to trade union nomination rights, to the establishment of the static security force to replace private security firms, and to the increased involvement of trade union representatives in policy making.

While borrowing tainted ammunition from Labour's enemies, however, the LCC's main concern has been to hand it on a plate to the right-wing dominated NEC to provide them with justification for a purge of Marxists and other left wingers from the leadership of Liverpool DLP.

Needless to say, the right wing trade union representatives who dominate the inquiry, now working with former lefts like Tom Sawyer and Audrey Wise, are only too pleased to get dirt from such a "respectable" left-wing source. Needless to say, too, the capitalist press has not spared any effort to give the maximum publicity to the LCC's allegations.

Red herring

Last summer the *Merseyside Labour Briefing* carried an interview with Peter Creswell, local NALGO leader and fellow traveller with the LCC. "It is essential", he said, "that the Labour leaders acknowledge that there is no real alternative to the course of action adopted by the present council. The arguments over *Militant* are, literally, a red herring."

Yet now the LCC are playing the part of political marks. Unable to win an influence amongst workers, defeated in the intense debates within the movement, their current witch-hunting allegations are fuelled by rancour and political spite.

Unfortunately, this little clique is attempting to give its lame allegations a poisonous sting by raising charges of corruption, intimidation and violence. Throughout the labour movement, with its irrepressible traditions of democracy, there is naturally an abhorrence of corruption and violence. It is therefore necessary to answer as fully as possible the LCC's allegations. Unfortunately, it is easier to throw muck than to clean it up—and it inevitably takes far more space to answer convoluted lies and distortions.

Liverpool District Labour Party is probably the most democratic in the country.

THE LIVERPOOL District Labour Party, in the LCC's view, is "not democratic enough." They have a whole list of gripes, which we will come to later. But their main complaints raise fundamental issues.

They object to trade unions affiliating directly to the DLP, which they claim gives "trade unions disproportionate influence". They object to the DLP acting as a "political Parliament" for the Liverpool labour movement, and complain that the DLP has

"usurped" functions of the CLPs and wards.

These points, which are really political not purely organisational issues, are taken up elsewhere. Without a strong basis of trade union affiliation (which is in accordance with one of the two options for DLPs provided for in the Labour Party rules), without the direct participation of delegates and members in DLP aggregates, and without city-wide campaigns in support of council policy, the city's Labour council would not have

been able to achieve the unquestionable gains of the last three years.

When the LCC's detailed complaints are examined, however, it is clear that they are based on misinformation and distortion. The claim, for instance, that key decisions, like the redundancy notices and the Asda scheme (see *Militant* 24 January), were never referred to DLP delegates is completely untrue.

The LCC's dossier is a shameful compilation of petty complaints, deliberate misinformation and outright lies.

THERE ARE other weaknesses in DLP operations, asserts the LCC, trying to paint a picture of an undemocratic body. "There is an inadequate check on delegates and their credentials, with no central list being provided for scrutiny."

This is untrue. There has always been a book, a central list, at DLP meetings. This is used to check credentials, and has always been available to any delegate who asked to inspect it. At recent DLP meetings because of the numbers involved, stewards issued individual voting cards, written out in advance, to delegates on production of their credentials. As a double check, delegates were also asked to fill in and hand in slips on their notices, which are used to compile attendance records.

The DLP's "normal functioning" is "often treated in a cavalier manner," claims the LCC. "Even before the suspension, there has been no DLP meeting since September..."

In fact, there were just two ordinary business meetings which did not take place prior to suspension, which was imposed just before the December meeting. These were in October, at the time of the Labour Party Conference in Bournemouth, and in November, when the budget crisis came to a head.

Democratic basis

These were hardly ordinary months when normal business meetings could take place. The financial and political situation changed from day to day, sometimes from hour to hour. The leadership of the DLP was far from having a "cavalier" attitude.

The DLP Executive met seventeen times. The DLP convened eight aggregate meetings, five public meetings, a national conference, and there were numerous meetings with the trade unions.

The campaign to win additional

resources to avoid cuts could not have been waged without wide support from the Liverpool labour movement, which is why the DLP held its meetings on the widest, most democratic basis.

One of the reasons for dropping (two) ordinary meetings, say the LCC, is a "preference for 'aggregates' which mix delegates and members." Of course, aggregates involve both delegates and members. But decisions are not taken by "mixed" voting. Delegates take the decisions by voting with their credentials. Afterwards, other members present are asked to vote in a consultative capacity.

Oppose cuts

In *Tribune*'s "Exclusive" report of the LCC's complaints, it is alleged that at the 22 November DLP which ratified the budget settlement, "some delegates were locked out because the hall was full". This was a packed meeting, with over 700 delegates and visitors present. But stewards made every effort to ensure that delegates were admitted. Which delegates were unable to get into the meeting? There have been no complaints from delegates to DLP officers. There is no justification whatsoever for the LCC's unsubstantiated allegation that, as they slant it, some delegates were "locked out".

The "danger" of aggregates, according to LCC, is that "it is impossible to scrutinise the actions of the executive and the council leadership... particularly when meetings are called at short notice and are presented with complex financial and other information on the night itself." What, really, is the LCC's complaint? The Labour group's general policy was clear—to oppose cuts and fight for this Tory government to provide the necessary resources. The aggregates

were called because of events—which often meant rapid changes in the position.

How many other Labour groups consult the widest number of DLP delegates and members on the details of policy and tactics, and publicly present the ranks with "complex financial and other information"?

If the LCC had their way, DLP delegates would meet behind closed doors, without the scrutiny of rank-and-file members, and "democratically" vote to abandon the fight against cuts. Correction: They would not have embarked on a real campaign in the first place!

The LCC want a DLP which is insulated from the trade unions in the front line of the battle against cuts and screened from scrutiny by Labour's ranks. Perhaps they believe that the Labour Committee for Careerists would gain a stronger position under such conditions?

Fortunately, supporters of the LCC are in a tiny minority in Liverpool. In the 22 November DLP meeting, out of about 200 delegates present only 7 or 8 voted against endorsing the Labour group's budget proposals. Throughout all the DLP meetings they refer to, a maximum of 20 delegates voted against the Labour Group's and DLP Executive's proposals.

Isolated minority

The LCC are a tiny isolated minority in the Liverpool labour movement. Instead of fighting for their ideas, however, they are providing the NEC's completely undemocratic inquiry with scurrilous allegations for use as "evidence" to justify a purge of the DLP. It is evidently on the organisational repression of ideas from above, not a on a political struggle to win support for their policies, that these people place their hopes.

The LCC's spiteful catalogue of unsubstantiated allegations expresses the frustration of disappointed careerists.

AFTER CRITICISING the DLP for acting as "a general political parliament", the LCC then claims that the "process of selecting councillors for the Local Government Panel is frequently used as a political filter to exclude opponents of *Militant* and their allies".

To anyone who knows the real situation in Liverpool, the LCC's picture is a travesty of reality.

Liverpool's Labour Group embraces a wide range of political views, including some right-wingers. Even councillors who have voted against the group on important issues have not been ousted from the group or threatened with expulsion from the Party, although their policy and record is obviously taken up in the party.

The policy of the DLP executive, including supporters of *Militant*, is that so long as members agree to abide by DLP policy and accept decisions of the DLP they should be accepted onto the local government panel.

It is clearly up to wards to select their own candidates from the panel on the basis of political views, commitment, and individual ability.

Militant supporters have consistently opposed the policy, advocated by some lefts within the Labour Group, that opponents of the DLP's policy should not be placed on the panel.

Even the five right-wing councillors who voted against the group's no-cuts budget, although they have rightly been removed from some committees, have not had the whip withdrawn, have not been excluded from the Labour Group, and have not been threatened with expulsion from the party.

Party policy

The DLP executive considered that another councillor who voted against the no-cuts budget, Eddie Roderick, who lost his seat and subsequently had to be reconsidered for the panel should not be placed back on the panel. However, Roderick appealed to the regional office, who ordered that he should be reinstated on the panel—which was complied with, while it was pointed out to wards that he had been censured both by the DLP and the region.

The LCC give a completely distorted account of questions that are put to candidates for the panel. In reality, candidates are asked

three standard questions: 1. why they wish to be councillors, 2. which body do they recognise as the policy-making body for the party in the city; 3. would they be prepared to stand in any ward in the city. The purpose of these questions is not to "filter out" political opposition, but to ensure that candidates, once they are elected onto the council, will remain firm on implementing party policy. This is an essential part of Labour Party democracy.

The LCC is now trying to claim that the DLP executive demands a "loyalty oath" from candidates for the panel. Perhaps LCC members will recall, however, that this is exactly the same tactic that right wingers, including subsequent defectors to the SDP, used in an attempt to discredit the demand for Parliamentary candidates to pledge that they would remain committed to implementing conference policy when elected to parliament. Tony Benn was vilified in the press for demanding such a commitment from Labour's public representatives. At that time the LCC supported Benn, and also came under attack from the capitalist media. Now they are using exactly the same trick against the democratic procedures adopted by Liverpool DLP.

Liverpool's refusal to make cuts and demands for more cash from the Tory government was completely in line with Labour Party conference policy.

This section of the LCC's report (as published in *Tribune*) is convoluted and disingenuous.

"DLP policy is constructed on far too wide a basis...candidates are in practice being asked to choose DLP policy over national party policy in crucial areas...neither is it acceptable to commit candidates to breaking the law..." This is retrospective backstabbing on a grand scale.

Liverpool's refusal to make cuts and demands for more cash from the Tory government was completely in line with Labour Party Conference policy. In June, when the council adopted a deficit budget, which was clearly entering into uncharted waters, none of those associated with the LCC raised opposition at that time. No-one in the DLP raised the questions now being raised by the LCC. It is only when the going got rough and national leaders began to attack the leadership of the DLP that the LCC began to raise these criticisms.

Contradictory allegations

Most of the cases which they refer to in relation to interviews to the panel came up long before the budget crisis.

The LCC also alleges that candidates are "routinely questioned about their specific ideological beliefs." However, some of the political "tests" which they allege only highlight the contradictions in their allegations.

They claim candidates are excluded because they support positive action—when the Council's 1985 statement on race relations clearly states that "the LP must aim to achieve through methods of positive action a true and fair reflection of the black population in the council's workforce as soon as possible." They allege that advocates of housing co-operatives are also excluded, which is an absurd claim. The Labour Group is not opposed to housing co-operatives, but as far as the City's funds are concerned it

has rightly given priority to its massive house-building programme, the only real solution to homelessness and slum conditions.

The real gripe of the LCC is that they are a tiny, isolated grouping within the Liverpool Labour Party. Their allegation that candidates are excluded on ideological grounds is ridiculous. The democracy and tolerance within the Liverpool DLP is undoubtedly superior to that which prevails in many other District Labour Parties.

It is noticeable that while the LCC makes sweeping allegations the specific evidence they offer is paltry. Scores of people have been interviewed for the panel, but the LCC can only produce a tiny handful of discontented candidates.

They cite Vicky Roberts, who was not accepted onto the panel in August 1983, not for ideological reasons but because she was not considered a strong candidate. Undoubtedly, in drawing up the panel the DLP has the right to take into account candidates' record, their commitment to work for the party, and their likely strength as a candidate.

The DLP was not confident that Vicky Roberts would be a good candidate. Nevertheless, on the insistence of the regional executive she was placed on the panel and selected to stand in Arundel ward. Unfortunately, she lost the election in a ward that had previously been won for Labour from the Liberals by Julie Lyon-Taylor a *Militant* supporter.

The LCC also give the case of Paul Thompson who was not put on the panel in September 1983. Again the Executive of the DLP

The LCC catalogues its numerous criticisms of the DLP leaders, but nowhere do they even summarise the real gains made by the council

Organisations for right

THE FIRE of the LCC is concentrated on the structure and running of Liverpool DLP. They put forward a series of proposals to 'reform' the DLP.

But this is not an organisational issue. Their organisational grievances and proposals reflect profound political differences. This becomes clear when the LCC asserts that to rectify the alleged defects in the workings and practices of the DLP "It will be necessary to confront the political power that *Militant* exerts in the city."

Elsewhere the LCC acknowledges that *Militant*'s "political power" is based on widespread political support within the Labour movement. Yet they want to try to undermine the influence of *Militant*'s ideas and policies without being prepared to take them on in political debate.

The LCC's own "organisational" changes have serious political implications. Yet nowhere in all their material do they say what policies they believe should be fought for. The LCC's dossier is full of criticisms of the DLP's policies and campaigns, criticisms which they failed to raise at the crucial time. But nowhere do they spell out what their alternative would be.

Militant has thoroughly analysed and answered the policies of the LCC (14 June, 1985). Here we will deal with the immediate points.

LCC abandoned struggle for socialism

(1) Nationally the LCC, which formally stood on the left and supported Tony Benn, has clearly abandoned any confidence in the ability of the working class to fight the Tories or to struggle for socialism. They have made themselves a left prop to Kinnock's right wing leadership. They try to justify the abandonment of the gains on policy and party democracy made between 1979/81, advocate a distancing of Labour from its working class basis and the dropping of commitments to fundamental socialist aims such as nationalisation.

In practice, they have adopted Kinnock's disastrous stratagem of subordinating all struggles to the need for Labour to win the next General Election. They mistakenly assume they can be assured victory by repudiating "extra-parliamentary action" and concentrating on media campaigns. From this mistaken standpoint, the struggle in Liverpool, through which the working class took on the Tory government, was an unfortunate "embarrassment" to Labour's front bench leaders.

Not only do the LCC go along with this line, but despite their avowals of opposition to witch-hunts, they are working in collusion with the right wing to purge those who oppose the abandonment of socialist policies and the suppression of party democracy.

(2) The Merseyside LCC, lagging

a little behind their Metropolitan mentors, supported Liverpool City Council's stand right up until the final stage in September and November 1985. Until then they rightly rejected the attacks on *Militant* as a diversion from the unavoidable struggle against cuts.

Along with the rest of the movement they accepted, until then, the economic decline and because of the exceptional penalties imposed by the Tories on the council, Liverpool labour movement had no choice but to wage a mass campaign against cuts. Even now, in an effort to cover their backsides they praise the "courage and determination shown by councillors, trade unionists and ordinary party members."

The LCC propose Labour Group when right wing once elected independence whose platform

(3) When the campaign reached a crunch point in September 1985, however, and the situation demanded decisive action by council trade unions and other workers the LCC bottled out. The LCC and their fellow travellers who have unfortunately, an influence amongst council white-collar unions, were incapable of arguing the case for effective action. Even the final budget settlement, which was a defeat but nevertheless mitigated the worst effects of cuts was far better than anything that would have been achieved without a struggle. If there had been a united struggle of all local authority unions much more could have been won. However, buckling under the pressure of the Tory media and the disastrous intervention of the Labour leaders, the LCC and company began to argue for a "solution" which would have meant acceptance of massive cuts. It was the role of LCC-type lefts in some of the council unions which divided the workforce and undermined the struggle. Now they recriminate that "Liverpool was left increasingly isolated" and that the DLP's campaign "was fuelled by a parochial sense of isolation and betrayal. . . . The DLP's tactics to gain the maximum from the situation are not dismissed as "brinkmanship".

(4) After the event the LCC cannot heap enough criticisms onto the DLP leadership. But what was their alternative? What policies and tactics, even in retrospect, do they offer?

They merely imply in a shamefaced way, that the DLP leadership should have accepted one of the "proposed compromise budgets" or adopted one of the "Stonefrost options"—of which they accuse the DLP of producing "inaccurate and

ational changes a cover wing policies

misleading summaries." But nowhere have they ever answered the clear factual explanation of the DLP leaders that every one of the Stonefrost options would mean a massive rate increase, rent increases, job losses and cuts.

The LCC are critical, too, of the final budget settlement's dependence on deferred purchase schemes financed by Swiss banks. This will mean huge interest payments, which are a form of deferred cut and represent a setback as we have always clearly stated. But the council already has accumulated inherited debts of over £700 million, and three quarters of every council house rent goes to financiers in interest charges.

Will the LCC come out clearly

**Is would take the
back to the days
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they stood.**

and say they support *Militant's* demand for the nationalisation of the banks and finance houses in order to abolish this enormous burden of debt which is thrown onto working people?

(5) The LCC catalogues its numerous criticisms of the DLP leaders, but nowhere do they even summarise the real gains made by the council during its campaigns: the exceptional house-building programme, the jobs created, the outstanding improvements in education, and so on. They talk of "brinkmanship" and ask "why had the DLP not been informed that the Swiss bank deal was available as a fall-back option?"

Even now they fail to see that this option was not available before November, having been blocked by Baker and the Tory government. It became a practical fall-back option only because of the struggle itself, which exerted enormous pressure on the Tories and their big business backers.

Incredible complaint

Again, much more could have been gained were it not for the indications from Neil Kinnock and the Labour leaders that they would be prepared to stand back if the Tories sent commissioners and troops into Liverpool to take over the running of the council. Since the LCC makes no criticisms of Kinnock's attempts to torpedo Liverpool's struggle we can only conclude that they approve of the Labour leader's actions.

(6) After the event, the LCC accuses the DLP leaders of failing to consult the unions or DLP delegates. This is an incredible complaint!

Never has a council leadership held more consultations with shop stewards or mass meetings of trade unionists. All key decisions, whether on budget strategy or on the tactics of the campaign, were put to DLP meetings. Many of them were at short notice, it is true, because of the pace of events.

But the LCC's claim that "the DLP never discussed or decided to issue 31,000 redundancy notices" is totally untrue. Prior to the one-day strike on the 25 September, which was a great success with mass support from all local authority unions, the DLP did discuss the issue and decided against issuing any redundancy notices.

However, because of the intervention of national trade union general secretaries and the failure of some local union leaders to argue the case for all-out action, there was not majority support for all-out action after the 25th. The situation then changed drastically. It was clear that unless some expedient was adopted the council would become immediately insolvent. It would not have been legally able to borrow any more cash or enter into any contracts, thus ruling out any kind of rescue package at all.

This situation was explained in to an aggregate meeting of the DLP which met immediately after the one-day strike, that is on the 26 September. By an overwhelming majority, DLP delegates decided to continue the campaign for extra cash from the government but as an immediate measure to endorse the issuing of redundancy notices "as a legal device which will enable us to continue the campaign". The case of the LCC and its allies was put forward in that meeting but decisively rejected.

(7) Then comes the LCC's list of organisational changes. These add up to a "Charter for frustrated careerists". If adopted, these proposals would set the labour movement back 30 years to the period of right wing domination.

The crucial proposal is point seven: "A new DLP constitution should restrict its powers to making policy guidelines and supervising the Labour Group, co-ordination of city-wide local government campaigns, and the municipal panel".

This is a covert way of advocating the autonomy of the Labour Group. This would take the Labour Group back to the position of the past where right wing Labour councillors, once elected, asserted their independence of the party on whose platform they stood.

This line goes hand in hand with the LCC's support for Neil Kinnock's efforts to establish the independence of the Parliamentary leadership, with the freedom to ditch radical conference policies and override democratic processes.

The reason Liverpool has been able to mount a mass campaign since 1983 is precisely because the council is democratically accountable to the DLP, and through the DLP can mobilise massive support

for its policies. The LCC, apparently, want to go back to the position where Labour Groups blatantly refused to take a stand on the policies decided by the DLP. They are prepared to expose elected Labour councillors to the pressure of the capitalists, of the Tory government, and unfortunately of the Labour leadership—without the support or check of the local party body.

At the same time, through their proposals to increase CLP and ward delegates to the DLP while abolishing direct trade union delegations, the LCC wants to drastically undermine the influence of the trade unions in the DLP. They complain that the trade unions have "a disproportionate influence"!

Liverpool has been able to mount a mass campaign since 1983 precisely because the council is democratically accountable to the District Labour Party, and through the DLP can mobilise massive support for its policies.

Again, this parallels their arguments that the trade unions, the basic mass organisations of workers, have a "disproportionate influence" in the Labour Party nationally. But the trade unions created the Labour Party. The unions are the class foundations of the party, and provide its most fundamental source of support in any struggles to defend workers' interests.

Undoubtedly the structure could be improved and there is room for democratic reform. But the LCC's aim is to insulate the District Labour Party, and especially the council itself, from the pressure of the workers' mass organisations. There is a bankrupt recipe for passive acceptance of policies imposed by a crisis-ridden capitalism.

Moreover, the LCC proposes to drastically restrict DLP aggregate meetings, subjecting them to "at least five days' notice" and restricting them to the role of "forums for discussion and debate, not decision making".

Urgent decisions

How contradictory! They complain about the lack of consultation and involvement in decision making, but want to restrict the participation of delegates and members in aggregates discussing key issues during the course of struggle. Five days notice would make it impossible for the membership to be consulted on urgent decisions necessitated by events.

The truth is, the Labour Careerist Committee, dreaming of the conditions under which they

would like to preside over Liverpool council, want to insulate the leadership from the rank and file of the movement, screening themselves from the scrutiny of the workers who sustain the struggle. They can't stand the heat of the battle, and want a constitution that would provide a nice cocoon.

They even demand that visitors from other parties should not be admitted to DLP aggregates. Apparently unaware of the enormous sympathy and support aroused amongst workers, the LCC are also blind to the indispensable support from around the country—organised and channelled in many cases by Labour Party members and trade unionists who have seized the opportunity on occasion to sit in DLP meetings. Far from be-

policies have great appeal among many party members in the city. Many members see them as the left—militant with a little 'm' rather than *Militant* with a big 'M'. This false image is naturally cultivated carefully by their organisation. More recently it has been strengthened by alliances made with local authority activists, mainly in the manual unions, for whom their top-down socialism has immediate appeal and material benefits in terms of jobs and conditions."

Leave aside the contradictions: their whole dossier accuses *Militant* of conspiracy, and their allegations about an "organisation" are intended to fuel a purge. Forget their political jibes: "workerist, bureaucratic", "cultivated image". Overlook their echo of Patrick Jenkin's lofty complaint that left Labour councils are simply feather-bedding local authority workers.

What the LCC are being reluctantly forced to admit despite all attacks is that *Militant* has deep support amongst the workers for its policies. Supporters of *Militant* in the leadership of the DLP have transformed the city's party and Labour Group. They have launched a struggle against big business and its Liberal/Tory representatives. And because of their bold policies and magnificent record of struggle *Militant* supporters in the city have won the active support and sympathy of wide layers of the working class.

What is the LCC's answer? Not debate over policy. Not a commitment to fight for a majority for their own ideas. No! Their answer is to support the right wing on the National Executive of the Labour Party and right wing trade union general secretaries in a purge of *Militant* supporters from the Liverpool DLP—in the hope that the Labour Committee for Careerists will then be able to step in to the vacant positions.

Well, they can think again. The ranks of the labour movement will not sit back and allow a purge of Marxists, a witch-hunt which they recognise is linked to an attempt to bury socialist policies and restore right wing domination of the movement.

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Scandalous claims of intimidation and physical violence, malpractice and corruption

IN AN effort to give spurious weight to their allegations against the DLP, the LCC have made scandalous claims of intimidation and physical violence. Through distortions and misrepresentation they try to build up a picture of "malpractice and corruption" maintained through the undemocratic manipulation of the Labour Group and the DLP.

This small clique, which previously claimed to support the council's stand against cuts, is using exactly the same methods that the Liberals, the Tories, and the capitalist media have used against Liverpool from the very beginning of its campaign. In their report to the NEC enquiry, the LCC are hurling, in many cases, the very same charges trumped up by the Liberals over the last three years.

The wheel has turned full circle for the LCC. During the struggle for Labour Party democracy in 1979-81, the LCC was included in the media attacks on the left.

Study of television news programmes by the Glasgow media group (*Really Bad News*) shows that the media repeatedly reported the left as "bullying", "intimidating", and "bordering on dictatorship". Instead of presenting the issues and policies raised by the Labour left, the media constantly "presented them as a persistent source of trouble and problems." A key organising principle for media news coverage, according to the Glasgow Media Group, was "the vision of the left as an insurgent force, variously engaging in 'bullying', 'intimidation', 'blackmail', 'undue pressure', and 'dictatorship'."

Ironically, on one occasion the Labour Co-ordinating Committee was singled out for attack on account of a letter recommending that Constituency Labour Parties should ask their MPs how they intended to vote in the leadership elections. In the news, this was overwhelmingly represented as "a naked appeal to blackmail and fear".

Struggle abandoned

Now, having abandoned the struggle and signed up with those who try to undermine Liverpool DLP's fight against Tory cuts, the LCC has resorted to using exactly the same methods against the DLP leadership.

Unlike some of the capitalist press, we have not been provided with advance copies of the LCC's full report. Neither has the DLP's executive itself been given an opportunity to answer the allegations in the report.

However, it is clear from press previews, that the LCC's document contains two specific allegations of physical violence—which, if taken at face value could have a damaging effect throughout the labour movement. Examination of these two cases, however, exposes a deliberately misleading method.

One allegation is that Christine Duala, prominent in NALGO and the Black Caucus, was attacked by a *Militant* supporter. There was indeed a regrettable incident, but the truth is rather different from the LCC's presentation. Christine Duala brought an assault charge against Carol Dalton, her alleged assailant, following an encounter between them in Liverpool 8. But in Court it became clear that Christine Duala was equally involved in the exchange, and both women agreed to be bound over for twelve months for the sum of £20. Carol Dalton strongly maintains that the incident was provoked by Duala. At the very least this is a case of six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, and it is ludicrous to try to place responsibility for this

incident, which did not occur at a meeting, on the shoulders of the DLP leadership.

The second allegation of violence is that two members of the National Organisation of Labour Students, Ben Lucas and John Fallon, were subject to attack by *Militant* supporters. Again, the truth is different. These two supporters of the 'Clause 4' group took hold of the membership list of the Central College Labour Club, and walked off out of the building with it. Two other members of the club asked them to return the list, and there was an argument in the street. During the course of this Fallon became involved in an altercation with a passerby who had no connection whatsoever with the Labour Club or *Militant*.

The LCC have included this in their dossier and it is now being relayed through the gutter press. But this incident occurred in 1984. No complaint has ever been made about the incident to the Labour Club, to the NOLS National Committee, to the District Labour Party, nor as far as we know to any other responsible body of the labour movement.

Unlike some of the capitalist press, we have not been provided with advance copies of the LCC's full report. Neither has the DLP's executive itself been given an opportunity to answer the allegations in the report.

If it was such a serious incident as is now being made out, why has it never been raised before? The conclusion can only be that an exaggerated version of this incident is being revived to add a further smear to the muck being thrown at the DLP during the current political attack.

Significantly, the LCC make no mention of a whole series of physical attacks on *Militant* supporters by supporters of the Black Caucus.

The LCC also complain in their dossier about verbal abuse of opponents of DLP policy, and again their complaints are absurdly exaggerated.

There have frequently been passionate, heated debates at DLP meetings, particularly during the budget crisis. Heckling and barracking has been no greater than experienced in other meetings of the labour and trade union movement. The leadership of the DLP has never used abusive language against those raising criticism and opposition. They have not denounced opponents as "traitors", "rats", or reviled them in obscene terms.

Undoubtedly some rank and file delegates did express anger at those attacking the DLP during the struggle. There was bitter resentment of Kinnock's denunciation of *Militant* supporters as "maggots". Extreme disappointment and anger was expressed, it is true, by delegates at the role played by some local and national trade union leaders.

Torpedoed

But this is not unique is it? Recently, Jim Ferguson, a leader of Liverpool NUT and associated with the LCC clique, told the press that his members believed that the leaders of NAS had been "riding on our backs all along in the teachers' dispute." Some, he went on, "have actually set out to undermine the action. Their treachery will go down in teachers' history." (*Liverpool Echo*, 25 January) Surely then, Jim Ferguson can unders-

tand the feelings of trade unionists involved in struggle when the Liverpool NUT torpedoed the council's campaign by taking them to court?

Another alleged incident of violence referred to by the LCC clearly relates to Lew Baxter although his name is not given. It has been claimed that he was subject to "intimidation" at the 22 November mass meeting of the DLP.

What really happened? When Baxter arrived the hall was already full and only delegates were being admitted. Baxter pushed his way past female stewards and stood at the rear of the hall. He was entitled to attend the meeting as a member, but there was a feeling of concern and anger amongst many delegates because of Baxter's attacks on the DLP and Party members in the *Sunday Times* for which he writes.

A motion was passed overwhelmingly that Baxter "be asked to leave". The chair, Tony Mulhearn, ruled that because Baxter was a member he could not be told to leave. The motion was an expression of anger, but in fact Baxter was not even formally

ordered out let alone physically ejected. A Regional Labour Party official present, Peter Collean, reported on the incident to the NEC. But his report makes no mention of any threats, intimidation or force being used against Baxter.

The LCC's dossier, which they have not been prepared to submit to the DLP officers, contains a host of other allegations, which can only be answered here very briefly.

Militant councillors, the LCC alleges, have publicly threatened to sack local council trade union officials who oppose the *Militant* line.

Support for fighting socialist policies can only be won by presenting the facts and arguing the case for politics and tactics.

This is nonsense. This would not be accepted either by the DLP or by the local authority trade unions. Support for fighting socialist policies can only be won by presenting the facts, arguing the case for policies and tactics.

"Job nomination rights" claims *Tribune* (24 January), on the basis of the LCC's report, are "given by the council to *Militant* controlled trade union branches (and) abused to strengthen the *Militant* political machine."

Here the LCC has taken up the favourite gripe of the Liberals. The local authority trade unions do have nomination rights, and the G&M, because it is the biggest union, has the most extensive rights. These were established through negotiations after Labour took control in 1983, and the LCC has never raised this complaint before. Unions have well established procedures for drawing up lists of candidates, and these are subject to inspection by the council. Council officials, not stewards, have the final say on appointments. However, it is true that amongst those

nominated for jobs are included workers "blacklisted" by local bosses, jailed for their struggle to defend jobs, and some of them are undoubtedly *Militant* supporters. Yet while alleging "abuses" and even "corruption" the LCC gives no specific examples, merely coming out with the astounding allegation "that some party members previously unemployed now have jobs".

The LCC also alleges "that Further Education student sabbatical officers are, in effect, full time *Militant* officials, appointed by *Militant* councillors and paid for on the rates without ever having been elected by Liverpool students."

This is an outright lie. There are three student sabbaticals, not five as the LCC document apparently alleges. They were not appointed by a councillor at all, but elected by the Further Education Federation, which comprises of delegates directly elected by all students from each student union. Next year, after reorganisation of FE colleges, it is proposed that there will be four student sabbaticals, all directly elected by the student bodies. Finance for the sabbaticals comes, of course from the council; but it is part of the council grant to the FE colleges. These sabbaticals are administered with the approval of the NUS, in the same way as other posts in voluntary organisations, and the posts are advertised every year throughout the press and in the FE colleges.

"There is according to LCC, 'Victimisation of council employees who do not support *Militant* policies by being sent to the so-called 'Leper Colony'."

This is incredible. LCC is simply repeating the reactionary smears of the Liberals. No council employee has been victimised for his or her political views. The Liberals' complaint is that there are a handful of council employees who worked during a one day strike action early in 1983 against the then Liberal controlled council's attempts to privatise some council services. The blacklegging union members were giving a hearing and then disciplined, being asked to give their day's pay to a charity of their own choice, they refused,

and other trade unionists refused to work with these individuals. Are the LCC demanding that trade unionists should be forced to work with these scabs?

"Malpractice in the appointment of the council's Static Security Force", is also alleged by the LCC, more Liberal propaganda regurgitated by the LCC. The Liberals have persistently tried to portray this group as a sinister force. They were organised in order to take over the security of council buildings, depots, etc from the private security contractors that the Liberals previously hired at the ratepayers' expense. Private security firms are notorious for low pay and long hours, and an anti-union policy. Does the LCC want to return to the Liberals' methods? The same nomination rights apply to the security force as to other council jobs. Again, the LCC make sweeping allegations, but give no specific details. Once again they are trying to smear the leadership of the council.

Members win the right to fair hearing

MOVES IN the High Court on 28 January by leading members of Liverpool's suspended District Labour Party gave a serious jolt to the National Executive's inquiry.

For the first time, despite repeated requests over the last three months, the DLP has been given assurances that anyone facing disciplinary charges arising out of the inquiry will be given a fair hearing, "according to the rules of natural justice." This means that the present inquiry must be regarded as a preliminary investigation.

Anyone facing action will be given details of the charges and evidence against them, with the right to a fair hearing.

Tony Mulhearn and other DLP officers formally withdrew their application for an injunction when an affidavit from Larry Whitty, the LP general secretary, was produced in court giving the necessary assurances. Although not a binding undertaking, the judge commented that if the NEC did not stick to its word there would be an "open and shut case" for the DLP to return to overturn any action against them.

After the hearing, Tony Mulhearn said: "We reject the need for this inquiry, but we agreed to co-operate. We were given some assurances at the start, but there has never been any clear guarantee that we would be able to reply to all the allegations being made from various quarters. It is a scandal that we were forced to go to the courts to ensure we get democratic treatment."

Tony also expressed anger that the NEC's lawyers had dragged the hearing out, no doubt at great expense. The DLP made it clear that they simply wanted clear assurances on the inquiry's procedure, but Larry Whitty's affidavit was only produced later in the hearing.

The right-wing majority on the NEC are meeting growing difficulties in carrying through their present round of inquiries, purges and individual expulsions. At a recent meeting, Labour Party regional organisers complained about increasingly being tied up in disciplinary problems, especially when the bureaucratic and undemocratic methods being used are arousing hostility and discrediting them in the eyes of members.

Some of the Labour Party's full-time staff have woken up to the fact that internal battles, especially when waged against the most active socialists in the party, are a disastrous diversion from fighting the Tories. They should draw the necessary conclusions and put a stop to the witch-hunt!

In what amounts to a clear admission of the undemocratic approach adopted so far, the NEC at its meeting on 29 January called a halt to further disciplinary appeals until new guidelines, drawn up on legal advice, are issued.

It is ludicrous that the leaders of the Liverpool DLP, who are currently fighting the District Auditor in the courts, and face additional Tory cuts in March, should be diverted to the courts to defend their position against a right-wing NEC. Equally, it is madness for the Party's leadership to be preoccupied with purging Labour activists.

Pressure, with resolutions and protest, must be stepped up throughout the Party to make it clear to the NEC and the Parliamentary leadership that their job is to fight the Tories, not the socialists.