

# SCRUTINY

## APRES NOUS LA SECHERESSE

The GLC and metropolitan councils will be abolished at midnight on 31 March. The *New Statesman's* 'Bye Bye GLC' special issue is on pp 10-16; here we scrutinise the fate of voluntary organisations, enterprise boards and an assortment of secondhand local politicians

THE LONDON Voluntary Service Council estimates that the capital's voluntary bodies face a £15-20 million a year 'gap'. If we assume that three-quarters of their costs are salaries, that means the loss of over 11,000 jobs in London alone.

Voluntary bodies are funded from the 'tuppenny rate', the power by which councils can spend money on schemes for the benefit of their inhabitants, but which aren't part of their statutory services. Between 64 and 90 per cent of the GLC and metropolitan councils' spending of this kind is on economic development and job creation — which they've no specific legal authority to spend money on. The rest — including grants to lesbian and gay, Black, disabled and other minority groups — is what Tory propaganda has latched onto.

After abolition, the borough and district councils that want to take over these schemes will have to find the money out of their own tuppenny rate (the amount raised by a 2p rate).

The GLC's last-ditch attempt to provide 'forward funding' — to keep favoured groups going until the next Labour government — has been halted by Tory Westminster council's court action. If appeal is allowed to the House of Lords, the outcome won't matter as the GLC will be no more.

Random examples of projects threatened by the Westminster case are the GLC's benefits take-up project and the Homeless Volunteer programme. But abolition has had indirect effects too. The London Fields Health Project, which was going to be an alternative health centre offering acupuncture, osteopathy and homeopathy in run-down inner-city Hackney, has collapsed because the GLC doesn't

have enough people or time to process the £50,000 grant approved in July 1985.

At the grass roots, among the workers in hundreds of projects and their 'clients', it's the uncertainty more than anything which is finishing off the (mostly far from radical) municipal socialism of Britain's urban areas. 'There is a terrible strain on staff,' says Joe Simpson, fundraiser for Community Service Volunteers. 'All their mental energy is being used up in worrying about funding and job security.'

Jane Dibblin and  
John Rentoul

## Where to next?

A by-product of abolition is the turning of hundreds of (mainly Labour) politicians onto the streets. It's all right for the like of Ken Livingstone, MP-to-be in Brent East, but what about the others?

The leader of Tyne and Wear,

Michael Campbell, is over 70 and doesn't have any plans. Nor has Bernard Clarke, leader of Greater Manchester Council, who says it would've been wrong to look elsewhere while 'fighting the good fight' against abolition.

Several abolishees are dropping down a tier and (re)turning to district level politics. Gordon Morgan, leader of West Midlands county council, is over retirement age, but is standing for Sandwell district council in the 8 May elections. John Gunnell, chemistry teacher and leader of West Yorkshire, and is standing for the same Leeds ward of Hunslet on 8 May. Mike Ward, deputy leader of the GLC after last year's rates fiasco, would probably like to be leader of a Labour-controlled Wandsworth council — currently Tory London's privatisation flagship.

And, as we reported last week, Keva Coombes, leader of Merseyside, is being entreated to stand in his Everton ward for Liverpool city, to provide an alternative leadership to Militant 'after the expulsions'.

For all the talk of the GLC being a national platform for ambitious local politicians, only Ken Livingstone, housing chair Tony McBrearty and Paul Boateng have been selected for winnable parliamentary seats. Meanwhile GLC women's committee chair Valerie Wise and Inner London Education Authority leader Frances Morrell are both in contention for Hyndburn (aka Accrington, Lancashire). Outside London Geoff Edge, West Midlands economic chief, has been selected for marginal Birmingham Yardley. But in London at least, lower-tier council leaders seem to have done much better in selection contests.

## Left enterprise splits Tories

A campaign by right-wing Tories to close down the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB) has split the Conservative party and the Cabinet — allowing GLEB and the other boards to survive in some form.

Head of the nasties is millionaire deputy leader of the GLC Tories, Cyril Taylor, who led a successful lobby of 10 Downing Street to freeze £8 million of GLEB's money at the last minute. The Department of the Environment had already indicated that the cash, from the GLC, would be released. Backing him is Norman Tebbit, who has said that he sees GLEB as a precursor of an alternative socialist industrial strategy.

One of Taylor's more moderate colleagues said last week: 'The Right fear the acclaim GLEB has had which they think will lead to this kind of interventionism becoming respectable.'

In the pink corner is Environment Secretary Kenneth Baker, one of whose senior officials wrote to the GLC last December: 'The Secretary of State hopes that as many London boroughs as possible will become members of GLEB.' Behind him is the other Kenneth — Clarke, Employment Minister, wet — who told journalists only a month ago that he felt there was a need for more local public job creation agencies. And earlier Energy Minister Peter Walker had written a letter congratulating the work of GLEB's energy and employment network.

Cyril Taylor's group of right-wing ideologues thought a series of corruption scandals and the failure of two investments last year had finished GLEB off, and were furious when the Tory boroughs of Bexley, Ealing and Brent joined 11 Labour councils in taking over GLEB's funding — at a reduced level. They were particularly incensed because of GLEB's policies of supporting worker co-ops, industrial democracy and equality for Black people and women at work.

But last week Taylor was boasting to fellow Tories that he'd 'scuppered GLEB' by getting Mrs Thatcher to intervene and overrule 'the softies at the Department of the Environment'. Lord Elton, Baker's deputy, announced a total ban on the release of GLC money on 12 March.

Despite this, the GLEB boroughs met last Friday and unanimously decided to support GLEB, although there's now little prospect of it going ahead with planned investments involving over 1,000 new jobs — on top of the 3,000 already created in 200 enterprises. Also threatened are GLEB's acclaimed technology networks which link London colleges and teaching hospitals to the development of socially-useful products.

John Rentoul

Abandoning HMS W Yorks, etc (top to bottom): Cllr Gunnell, 1988 MP Edge, Derek Hatton's successor Coombes and possible MP Wise

