

ILEA

The rumbling Tory campaign to break up the Inner London Education Authority has finally gone public.

It all started in 1978 when Sir Horace Cutler, leader of the then recently elected Tory Greater London Council launched an enquiry into his pet hate, ILEA, chaired by Sir Frank Marshall. Unfortunately for Sir Horace, Sir Frank took his brief seriously and concluded on rational and strategic grounds that inner London's unified education service should stay albeit with some political changes.

The advent of the Tory government presaged the new and most recent chapters. Stuart Sexton, ex-GLC Councillor and ally of Sir Horace, became political adviser to Mark Carlisle, Secretary of State for Education, and within months first Wandsworth and then Westminster Tory Borough Councils made 'spontaneous' calls for education in their areas to be handed over from ILEA to

them. Shortly afterwards Mark Carlisle asked a group of London Tories under the chairmanship of Kenneth Baker MP to report to him on the future of ILEA.

Without seeking evidence from any responsible body, the Baker Committee predictably proposed ILEA should be broken up and education given to the inner London boroughs; but in a report which so obviously had been argued from its conclusions to its supporting 'evidence', ignoring all contrary fact, it rapidly became discredited. The latest stage thus emerged with Carlisle setting up a Ministerial Working Party, comprising Baroness Young, Minister of Education, together with Ministers from the Treasury and the Department of the Environment, to 'examine the local government arrangements for the provision, administration and financing of education' with the implicit threat that legislation may follow in November to break up ILEA.

Greater London Council area and boroughs within ILEA



ILEA runs the education service in the 12 inner London boroughs and the City of London. It is unique in both its size and in being the only education-only local authority in the country. Elsewhere county or local councils, responsible for a variety of services, run education. ILEA's creation arose out of a long fight in the early sixties to keep the then London County Council Education Service unified when the LCC was broken up between the boroughs and the GLC. The success of that campaign against the then Tory government retained a system which was and is unparalleled in the country for its diversity and extent of provision. However a number of Tories have been less than happy with the retention of this Labour stronghold both because of its control of education in the few boroughs that are otherwise Tory controlled and because its level of provision not only gives inner London a high level of

service but acts as a national leader and innovator which other authorities aspire to match.

The fragmentation of inner London's education between the 12 inner London boroughs would destroy the capacity to maintain this level of provision in two ways. First it would end the redistribution of rates between the rich and poor areas achieved by ILEA's common rate levy on the whole area. This achieves a much higher level of redistribution according to need than the rate equalisation scheme and, given that only 2 boroughs (covering the West End and City) provide 52% of ILEA's rate income whilst the other 10 provide 48%, the poor boroughs would face a massive cut in service or up to a doubling of their rates.

Secondly, it would do away with what Sir Frank Marshall in his report recognised as the ability 'to provide expensive special services at a low unit cost for which smaller authorities and most inner London boroughs would never have the marginal capacity. This, of course, means that ILEA is all the better able to provide a service and offer a lead to the rest of the country . . .' The facilities under threat include the multitude of special schools for different handicaps, rural sports and other specialist centres, the wide range of in-service training and advisory staff, different resources centres, special courses and help for children with particular gifts or problems as well as a range of professional and technical support staff.

The campaign against the break-up of ILEA has already scored a significant success and from its beginning has had a strong consumer leadership. First in the field were the parents of Wandsworth who, together with local teachers, have waged a very effective campaign against both the local council and wider proposals for ILEA break-up. Campaigns built around parent, teaching and non-teaching staff support, and in some areas the trades councils, have subsequently sprung up in nearly all other parts of inner London whilst all eight major unions representing teaching, administrative, manual and technical staff have come together through the South East Region of the TUC to form an unprecedented united campaign. The Young Committee has been flooded with objections outnumbering support for the break-up, in the ratio of ninety to one.

The strength of the campaigns has been their ability to identify simple issues. The arguments of additional bureaucracy and other loss of efficiency as well as loss of services, lowering of standards and disruption has enabled a strong appeal for support from consumers and ratepayers. The fact that the campaigns have not been merely

defensive but have adopted aims of improving both the quality of provision and participation of local interests in the democratic control of education has also strengthened their position. Undoubtedly the broad appeal of such arguments, which extends to Tory supporters and Tory Party members, has been influential on Tory local representatives, MPs and others who have come out against the break-up and led to the recently strengthening indications that the Young Committee may not propose a straightforward break-up of ILEA.

It is likely, however, that proposals will be put forward to manipulate political and financial controls with the aim of cutting expenditure and the enhanced level of education provision in inner London. A possible mechanism for this may be central government interference in determining levels of spending which may equal or go beyond the erosion of local government democracy in the recent Local Government Planning and Land (No 2) Bill.

The campaigners for ILEA now face their stiffest test in maintaining the breadth of support built up around the break-up issue to defend the quality and extent of education provision against this more subtle attack. If the campaign succeeds it could be an important opportunity to carry the opposition to public service cuts out of a relatively narrow base amongst labour movement organisations and their allies and into a much broader spectrum of society. The growth of such developments are essential in London and elsewhere if the increasingly dominant Tory attitude towards public services of being minimal activities necessary for social and economic order is to be challenged and the tide of opinion turned back towards a concept of them being an essential part of extending opportunities and the quality of life for all. Equally the campaign may need to succeed in generating public concern about the Government's insidious undermining of local democracy and centralising of control as shown in the Local Government and Land (No 2) Bill. If the Government attempts to apply further similar sanctions directly against ILEA to cut spending the local campaigns' existing support for maintaining and extending local democracy linked with its consumer/union concern about loss of service and jobs may well provide a strong base to generate public understanding and opposition to any government attempt to remove further power from local people to determine the level of their local spending on their own local services.

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