

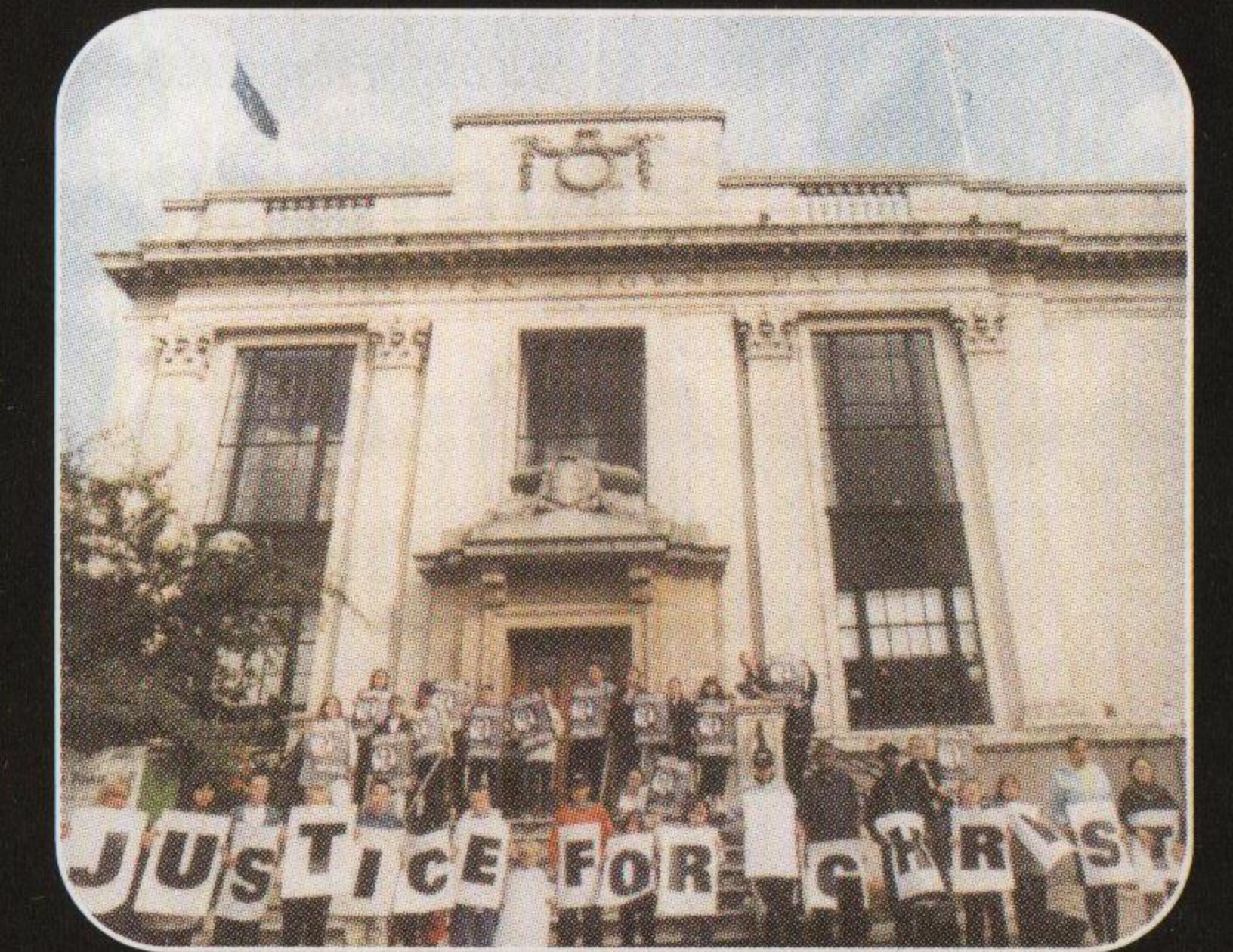
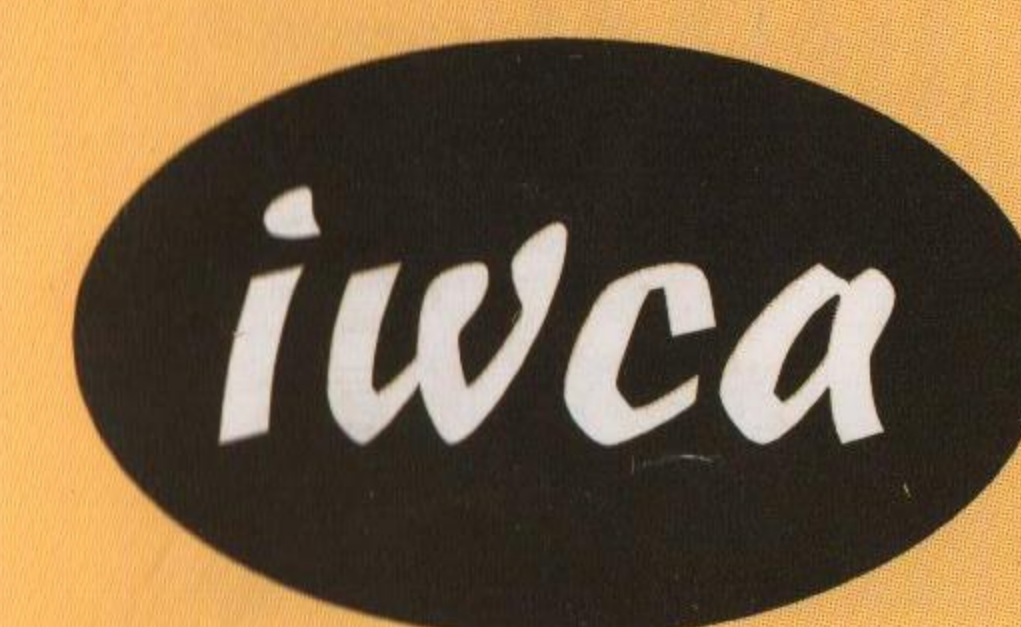
**“ The Independent Working Class Association has been established to promote and celebrate the political independence of the working class, and to pursue the political and economic interests of that class with no consideration for, and regardless of, the consequences to the existing political and economic structures. ”**

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# **Working class rule in working class areas**

## **Independent Working Class Association**

An introduction to the background, aims & policies of the IWCA



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Independent Working Class Association

# Background to the IWCA

Once it became clear that New Labour intended to formally abandon a commitment to social equality and justice, and in anticipation of the anti-working class nature of any future New Labour administration, a variety of groups came together to discuss how the economic, social and political interests of the working class could be best protected. The Independent Working Class Association (IWCA) was formed in October 1995 as a result of these discussions.

When New Labour was elected in May 1997, the IWCA responded by setting up a number of pilot schemes in selected places across the country. The emphasis at all times was on addressing the immediate interests of the working class in the locality in which the pilot scheme was based. It was an approach that provided the IWCA with the opportunity to test its basic strategy on a range of issues. These included fighting council corruption in Hertfordshire, confronting a mugging epidemic in Birmingham, the privatisation of council housing in Islington, exposing the small print in the New Deal provisions in Hackney, highlighting the dangers of mobile phone masts in Manchester, sparking occupations against council closures in Glasgow, taking up the fight against antisocial crime in Essex, and confronting drug-dealing in Oxford.

In September 2001 the IWCA registered as a political party. In May 2002 Stuart Craft became the IWCA's first elected representative after he was elected to Oxford City council. Elsewhere IWCA candidates ran the mainstream parties close, coming within 90 votes of claiming a seat in Hackney and taking an average of 25% of the vote in each ward contested.

Out of these experiences a political programme to address day to day concerns and the immediate needs of the working class has been constructed.

## Founding Statement

*“The Independent Working Class Association has been established to promote and celebrate the political independence of the working class, and to pursue the political and economic interests of that class with no consideration for, and regardless of, the consequences to the existing political and economic structures.”* October 21 1995



(Above) IWCA members in Hertfordshire helped bring about the collapse of the Welwyn & Hatfield Labour council, after they led a campaign against systematic corruption. In the county council elections in 1997, though missing out on a seat, Debbie Piper [pictured] gained over 1,000 votes. Eventually a sustained campaign by residents, forced some Labour councillors to resign. Others were unseated at subsequent elections. (Below) In Newtown, Birmingham, IWCA members organised the entire community to confront a mugging epidemic that neither the police or the council were interested in doing anything about.



# A Declaration of Independence

Discussions on the founding of the Independent Working Class Association started in the mid-1990s, following the removal of Clause Four from the constitution of the Labour Party. The analysis presented below, from October 1995, sets out the basis on which the new organisation was formed.



“ As the [political] establishment abandons responsibility for sections of the population socially, they will also be forced to largely abandon sections of the urban areas politically as well. ”

Society is changing dramatically. In many ways conditions for the working class politically are similar now that the industrial wave is going out as it was one hundred and fifty years ago when the industrial wave was coming in. Industrialisation herded people from rural to urban areas where they began to organize themselves around the point of production in trade unions. Conversely, de-industrialisation is driving people from the large manufacturing centres back into their communities.

Now as then, the working class are bereft of a political voice, bereft of political power, bereft of political organization. The massive decline in union organization in the last decade has not been because of de-recognition or because workers have rejected trade unionism, but because of the decline in traditional industries and the growth of smaller scale units and unskilled part-time jobs where industrial relations are not required and where membership would in any case be an irrelevance. That is the future.

It follows, therefore, that trade unionism, as a political strategy for the working class is as dead as a dodo. The term 'labour movement', sometimes with a capital 'L', fails to distinguish between the Labour Party, the unions, the local councils, the left, and of course the working class. To all it is a reassuring term which sustains the myth of a wider structure in society, a 'labour movement'. Of course there is no such thing as the 'labour movement'. This is why the left is so demoralized; it has no real vision of the future. All it can do is wait around until either a Labour government is elected, or until economic crisis hopefully forces the

working class do to something. That is not a strategy for leadership but an opportunistic running after events in which 'politics' means little more than attaching a meaningless radical slogan to whatever turns up.

If the working class is to exert an influence over sections of the middle class rather than be dragged along by their radicalism, which is always the first to appear in a political crisis, then it must find a form of organisation, which allows it to exert leadership. And clearly what is needed now is working class independence and a new organisation - an independent working class organization. The setting up of such an organisation is the only practical response to the situation we are faced with - the total abandonment of the working class, even as a concept, by the Labour Party.

And forming such an organisation is not only possible but necessary, a case of love and need. For without organisation the working class has no voice. Without a voice there can be no resistance. Without resistance the British working class fulfils the role pre-ordained for it by the establishment and becomes, like its American counterpart, politically extinct.

In fundamental ways, the working class association being

proposed will be distinct from anything that exists in Britain now or in the recent past; a working class organization not only independent of, but hostile to, Labour. So from the outset, it follows that it has rejected not only Labour, but entryism, and the prospect of reform, be that reform either of Labour itself or the economic system.

And it must be a clean break with the past and be seen to be so. It will not orientate toward the trade unions or seek solace from the 'labour movement'. It will instead be community orientated and, in time, community based. Initially, as the best way of making a public statement and establishing a public mandate it might contest local elections, standing candidates or co-opting where appropriate independent working class candidates. Objective circumstances will throw up the campaign issues.

It will be led by the working class but not limited to the working class. Essentially however it must be a 'can do' organization; one that makes things happen or prevents them happening. Its short-term plan of campaign will be geared toward achievable goals. Pragmatism rather than idealism will need to be the watchword. Though its stance will be defiant it will still be a defensive formation. It will start from where the working class is, and where it is, in order to change it. It will be, first and foremost, a real class organisation no matter how backward working class thinking might be from the standpoint of the more 'sophisticated'. Membership will be openly available. Its activists will aim to become the best militants for the limited aims of the movement as it is.



“ A nation's economy can be successful while the living standards of its people fall. The continued wealth and visibility of middle Britain is entirely dependent on the continued impoverishment of working class children in particular. ”

## Programme

Since 1979, as a result of the strategies of all successive governments, the gap between the wealthy and the impoverished is the greatest since records began. In a study of 25 countries, child poverty in Britain was the third highest, outstripped only by Russia and our other free-market model, the United States. The example of the United States - the most powerful country in the world - demonstrates that the prosperity of the few invariably goes hand in hand with the degradation of the many.

It also shows that a nation's economy can be successful while the liv-

ing standards of its people fall. The continued wealth and visibility of middle Britain is entirely dependent on the continued impoverishment of working class children in particular.

The IWCA strategy is straightforward. It recognises that if the working class is to recover its share of the national cake and bring about a return in the level of investment in health, education and pensions to even pre-Thatcher levels, the working class must first retake political control and responsibility for its own communities.

In practical terms this means bringing an independent working class

analysis into the heart of local government thinking throughout Britain. In electoral terms it means supporting those candidates who are committed to putting the immediate interests of the working class first.

*The programme itself is, and has to be, an evolving document. It has to reflect the changing experiences of the working class and our experience as a campaigning party. Undoubtedly, as the IWCA begins to grow, people will join with new areas of expertise and experience which will feed back into the manifesto.*

# Antisocial behaviour



A combination of unemployment, the withdrawal of funding for youth facilities and the selling off of playing fields, drugs, and police indifference has left the vulnerable in many communities frightened to leave their homes. Burglaries, street crime and joy-riding have destroyed morale in many working class communities, making it all too easy for politicians to sit back and manipulate the situation to their advantage.



The IWCA believes the fight against anti-social behaviour in our communities must go hand-in-hand with the battle to secure decent youth facilities.

(Above) A funday in Govanhill, Glasgow, after a successful community clean-up initiated by the IWCA and supported by local residents and shopkeepers. This followed the closure of the local swimming pool in an area that suffers with youth disorder and anti-social behaviour.

(Below) Residents in Partick protest against plans by the Labour party to sell Thornwood Park.



## The IWCA will work for:

- The drawing together of all sectors, including official agencies, toward the goal of the working class ownership of local communities
- The reforging of pride in the community by organising clean-ups of estates, removing graffiti, and getting burnt-out cars taken away
- The ending of curfews for young people
- The proper funding of youth facilities
- The isolation by the community of those who persist in making life intolerable for the community

# Community Restorative Justice

Community Restorative Justice (CRJ) is a new way of dealing with antisocial behaviour. It is a cost-effective way of tackling the causes behind crime and the resulting breakdown in the relationships which connect people with a community.

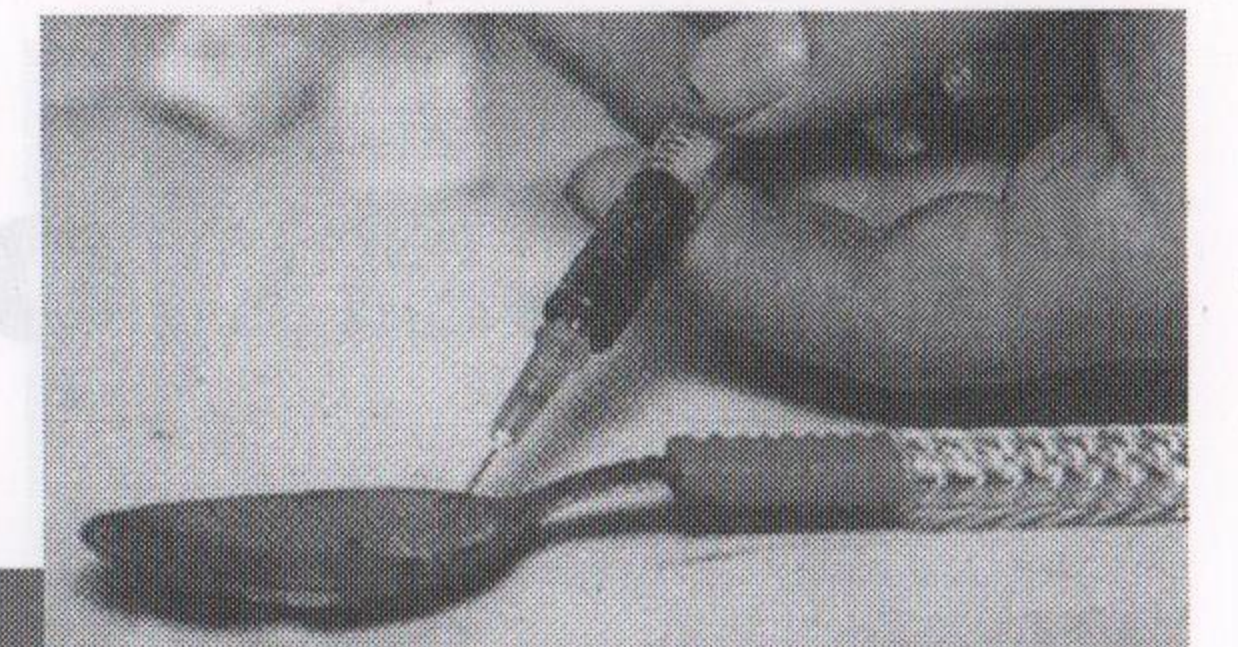
It also brings attention to the imbalance of resources within the current justice system. At present the bulk of investment is spent responding to crime on a retributive basis - fines, court orders, prison.

By comparison, when CRJ is used, tiny

amounts are invested in trying to resolve problems in a long term way. CRJ works to bring people together to resolve differences within a mediation process. It can play a vital role where the police and local authorities have lost the respect of local communities and where there is a stigma attached to cooperating with them.

- The IWCA will encourage the establishment of Community Restorative Justice Schemes within working class communities

# Drugs



Nationally and locally the war against drugs has proved disastrous for working class communities in general. In some areas the drug culture has destroyed community cohesion, setting young against old, neighbour against neighbour.

Despite all the talking from politicians and experts, the situation continues to deteriorate. Overwhelmingly, working class communities carry the cost of this failure. At issue is not whether some drugs or all drugs are bad, but how the resulting problems can be managed.

As part of a broader review, the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, which introduced the prohibition on buying and selling drugs and the criminalisation of drug users, needs to be assessed to determine what role the criminalisation of drugs may have played in the subsequent massive rise in heroin addiction.

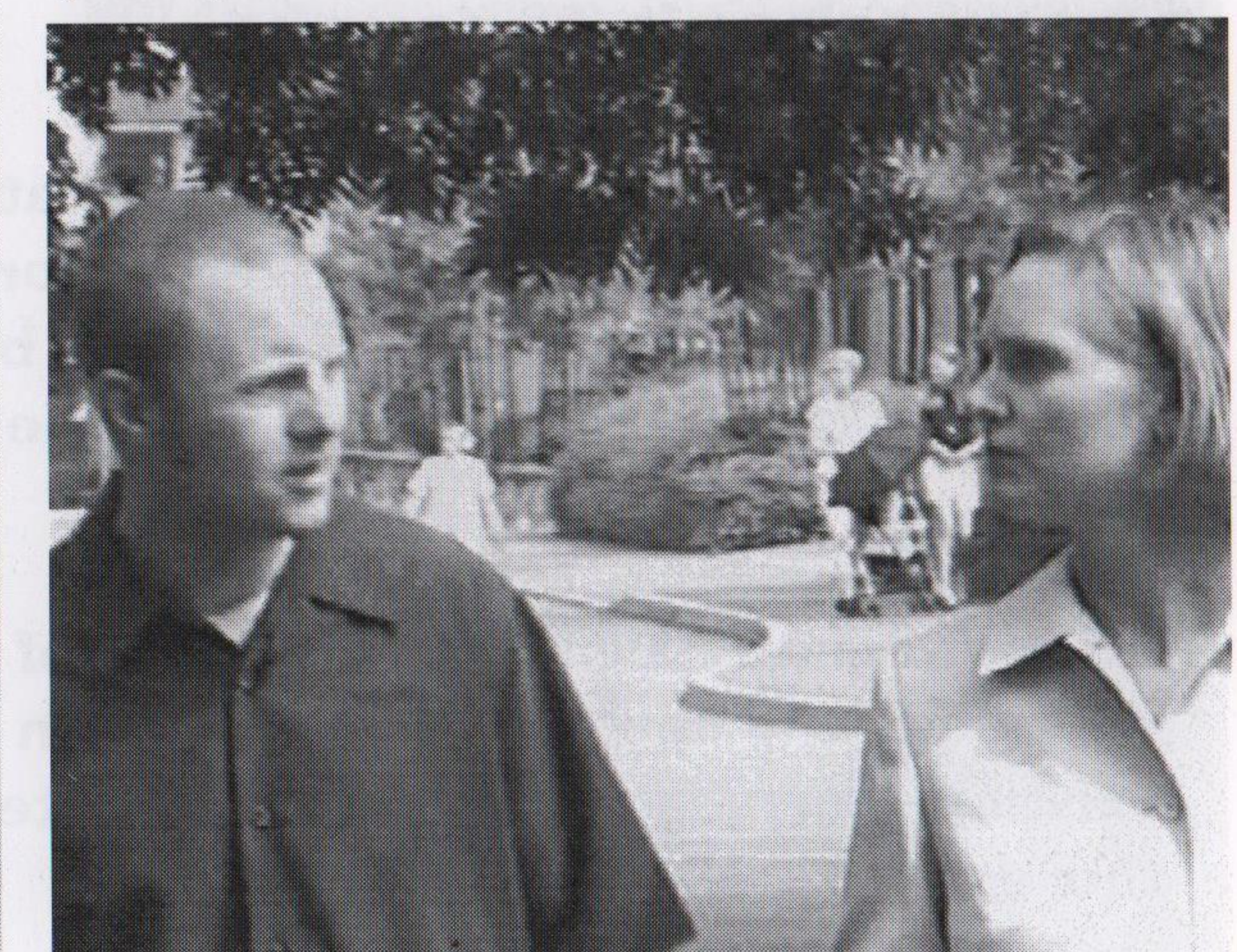


(Below) IWCA councillor Stuart Craft with a BBC reporter on South East Tonight. Over the last few years, the area Stuart represents, Blackbird Leys, Oxford, has seen a huge rise in drug-use and drug-related crime particularly in crack cocaine.

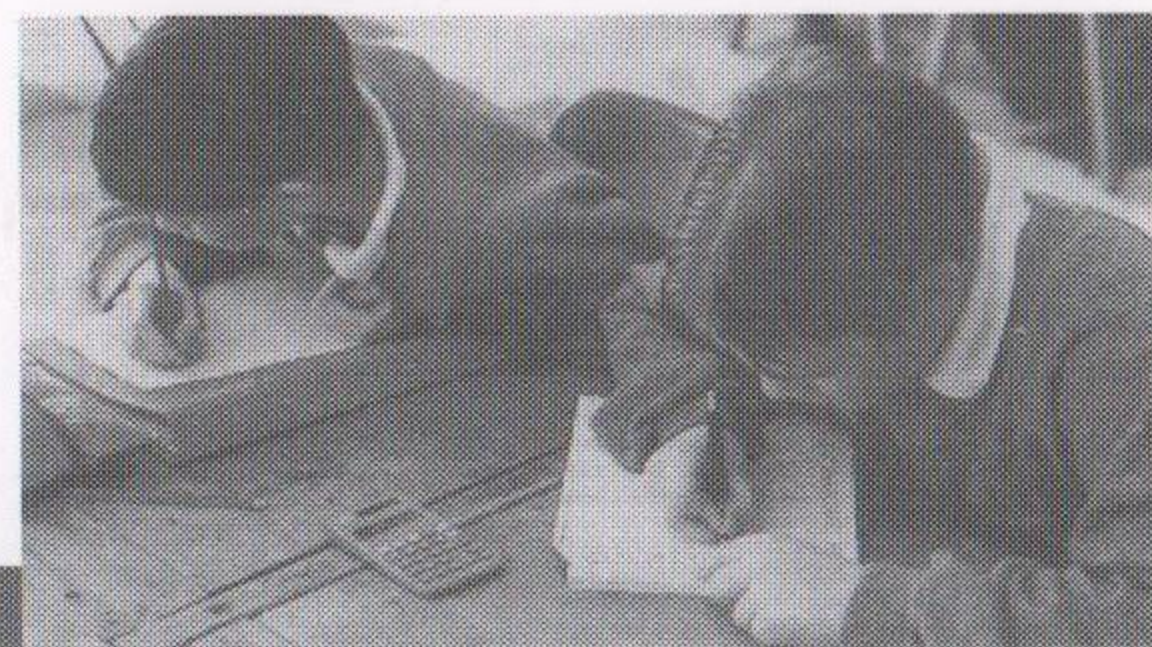
The IWCA has launched a multi-pronged attack on the problem: calling public meetings (Top) so residents can put forward their views on the matter and highlighting the lack of action from the police and housing associations who house many of the dealers. As a result of the campaign many of the worst culprits have been forced to leave the Leys area (Above).

## IWCA policy objectives are:

- The isolation by the community of drug dealers who prey on the community
- The proper provision of locally based and funded detox centres
- The establishment of a social contract with users for the proper disposal of needles etc
- The decriminalisation of cannabis
- GPs to be allowed to prescribe heroin in order to administer dosages safely, remove the need for ineffective methadone substitutes and undermine the criminal black market.
- A review of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act



# Education behaviour



According to research, as many as one in five adults has difficulty reading and writing. As funding for comprehensive schools continues to be reduced, the middle classes continue to opt for private schools and government subsidies follow them. There is no other country in Europe where private schools represent a fully fledged alternative to the state school system.

In Britain there are currently no less than 2,300 private schools with an income from fees of £3.2 billion. Moreover, schools such as Eton are registered charities and pay no tax at all. Such subsidies allow them to spend twenty times more on each pupil than the state sector.

Though a mere 7% of all children go to private schools, they account for 50% of places at Oxford and Cambridge. Working class children in turn have less than a 1 in a 100 chance of reaching top universities. Private education is a consequence of class privilege and a condition for its continuation.



Despite the Labour government's supposed commitment to 'education, education, education', increasingly working class communities have found themselves fighting a programme of school closures by many councils.

(Above) In London, Hackney IWCA for instance, has joined parents, pupils and staff in opposing the closure of Laburnum Primary School. Amongst the activities initiated have been the distribution of newsletters, a postcard campaign, petitioning, public meetings & an information day, a reunion for former pupils, a campaign video and a children's art day against the closure to counter the Labour council's discredited 'consultation' exercise.

## The IWCA is committed to asserting community ownership of our schools through:

- Education and community representatives being encouraged to work together for the fullest possible use of school facilities by the wider community outside of school hours
- An immediate halt to the selling off of school playing fields and the extension of existing sports facilities to compensate for those already sold off

- An end to the growing role of the private sector in public education
- The return to local geographical admission catchment areas. This will help to re-establish the community-school link
- An end to state funding of religious schools of any denomination\*
- Majority-elected parent representation on school governing bodies

\* This policy does not apply to Scotland at this time

# Housing

you're home



This country is presently experiencing a housing crisis. The current level of house building is the lowest since 1924. The selling off of council houses in the early 1980s should have led to the re-investment of the proceeds back into local affordable social/council housing. However, the Conservative government of the time, with a view to fully privatising council housing, refused to let local authorities re-invest in much needed council housing. Despite calls at the time from the Labour Party for all profits to be re-invested, the current Labour government has continued to allow private investors to profit from building affordable social housing.

The privatisation of council housing stock continues. In addition to this, for some years the perception of many inner city communities is that their housing needs are being deliberately denied to make way for private development at some time in the future. In short this means ordinary people being forced out of an area to make room for the middle classes who want to move in. In certain cases, supporting amenities (schools, libraries, and youth facilities) have been sold off or deliberately run down to facilitate this gentrification. Some have described the strategy as a policy of social cleansing.

This has come on top of the long-term council policy of effectively denying the children of residents the right to council housing in the areas in which they have been reared. This often means that families are broken up and the impact on the integrity, solidarity and sustainability of communities, leading to a situation where neighbours often hardly know each other, is socially disastrous. Not only are children often brought up without regular contact with uncles and aunts, but their grandparents, without family nearby to look out for them, are all too often prematurely forced into hospitals or homes at tremendous cost to them emotionally as individuals and to the NHS economically as an institution.

## The IWCA is committed to:

- The restoration of social housing to meet local needs
- The fight against council house privatisation and social cleansing
- Working with tenants who voted for stock transfer to ensure their new landlords deliver on the promises made
- An end to 'Daylight Robbery' where the government takes billions of pounds from council Housing Revenue Accounts each year
- The restoration of the 'sons and daughters' policy
- The capping of rents in the private sector
- The payment of an 'empty homes tax' for those private properties deliberately kept unoccupied



The IWCA campaigns for decent, affordable, housing for all. (Top & Below) IWCA members regularly accompany tenants on estate walkabouts and surveys aimed at forcing council and housing association landlords to fulfill their obligations. (Above) IWCA members protest against a yuppie-only development of luxury apartments.



# Local Democracy



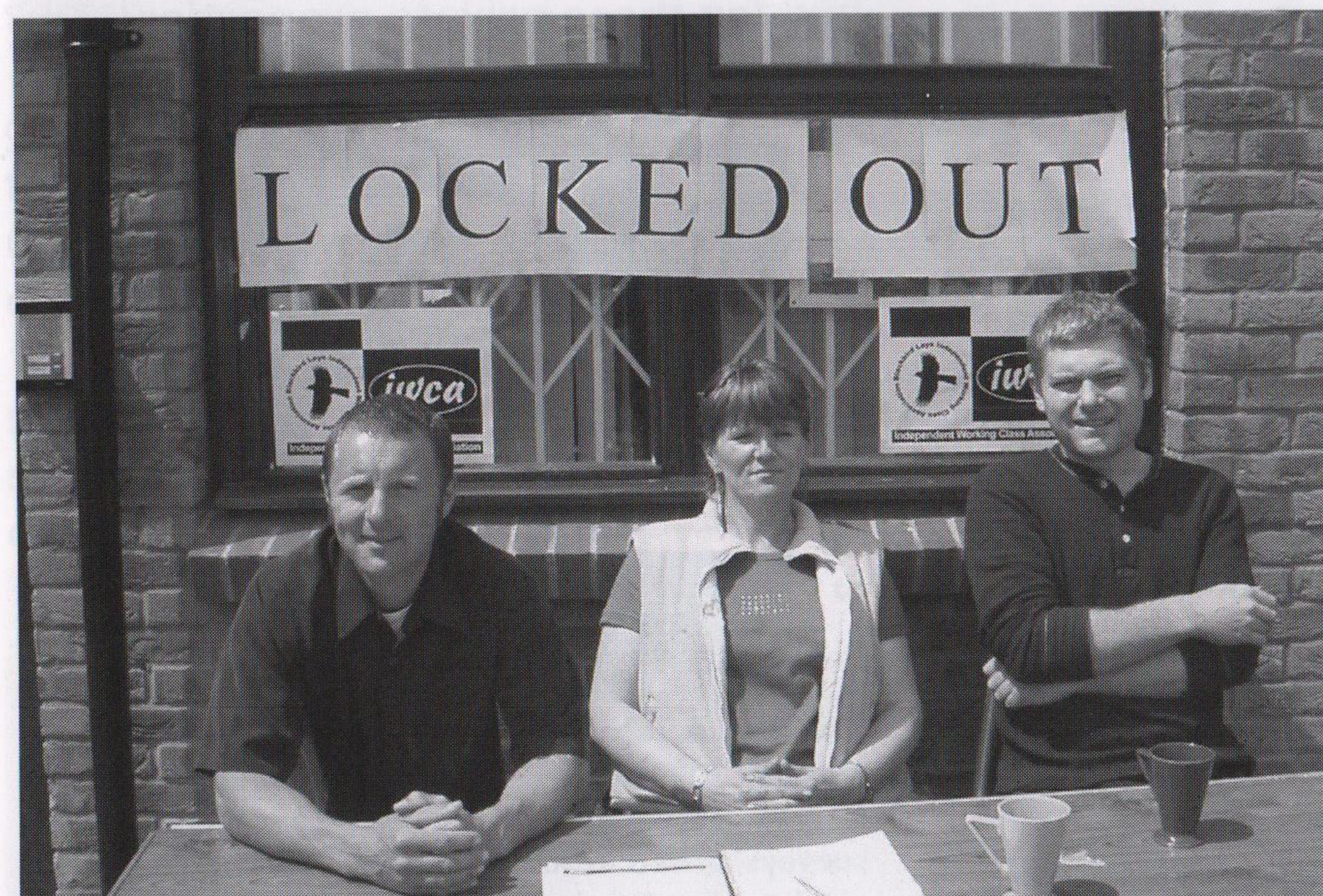
With many simply believing their vote does not count, the first past the post system of elections is forcing down working class participation. Increasingly, local democracy is being eroded, with funding coming almost entirely from national government which in turn dictates to local government on the policies deemed acceptable. Existing structures are also being increasingly centralised at local government level, thereby reducing the decision-making to a handful of 'cabinet' or 'executive' councillors. Eventually this may result in all decisions being taken by unelected quangos.

Rather than council wards being increased in size, the IWCA favours smaller wards. Rather than less democracy, the IWCA believes in the extension of local democracy. On the principle of 'no taxation without representation', the voting age for national regional and local elections should be lowered from 18 to 16. The minimum age to stand as a candidate should be the same as the minimum age to vote. Voters, not the law, should decide who is mature enough, or not, to be an elected representative of their community.

## IWCA policy objectives are:

- **The return to progressive taxation at a local level, with the wealthiest and large businesses, who profit through being in the community, being taxed accordingly**
- **Council Tax to be abolished and replaced with an income rather than property-based form of local taxation**
- **The setting of local tax rates to be decided by local councils**
- **The reduction of ward sizes to make councillors more accessible and accountable to their constituents**
- **The introduction of proportional representation for all national, regional and local elections**
- **The minimum age to vote and stand in all elections to be lowered to sixteen**
- **Future elections to be held over Saturday and Sunday to maximise voter turnout**

*\* Outside of reimbursement for genuine expenses, IWCA members elected to local government are not permitted to pocket councillors' allowances. Representatives will channel all additional monies into IWCA projects beneficial to the local community. IWCA councillors who work full-time for their constituents may accept reimbursement for loss of earnings*



(Top) When Stuart Craft [left] was elected to Oxford City council, Labour supporters found the democratic decision of the people of Blackbird Leys estate hard to accept and denied him access to local community facilities to carry out his councillor's surgeries. Unperturbed, the IWCA cllr simply held them outside the building until granted access. (Left) IWCA members in Havering host their own community forum meetings for local residents. The IWCA believes there is far more to local representation than council elections.



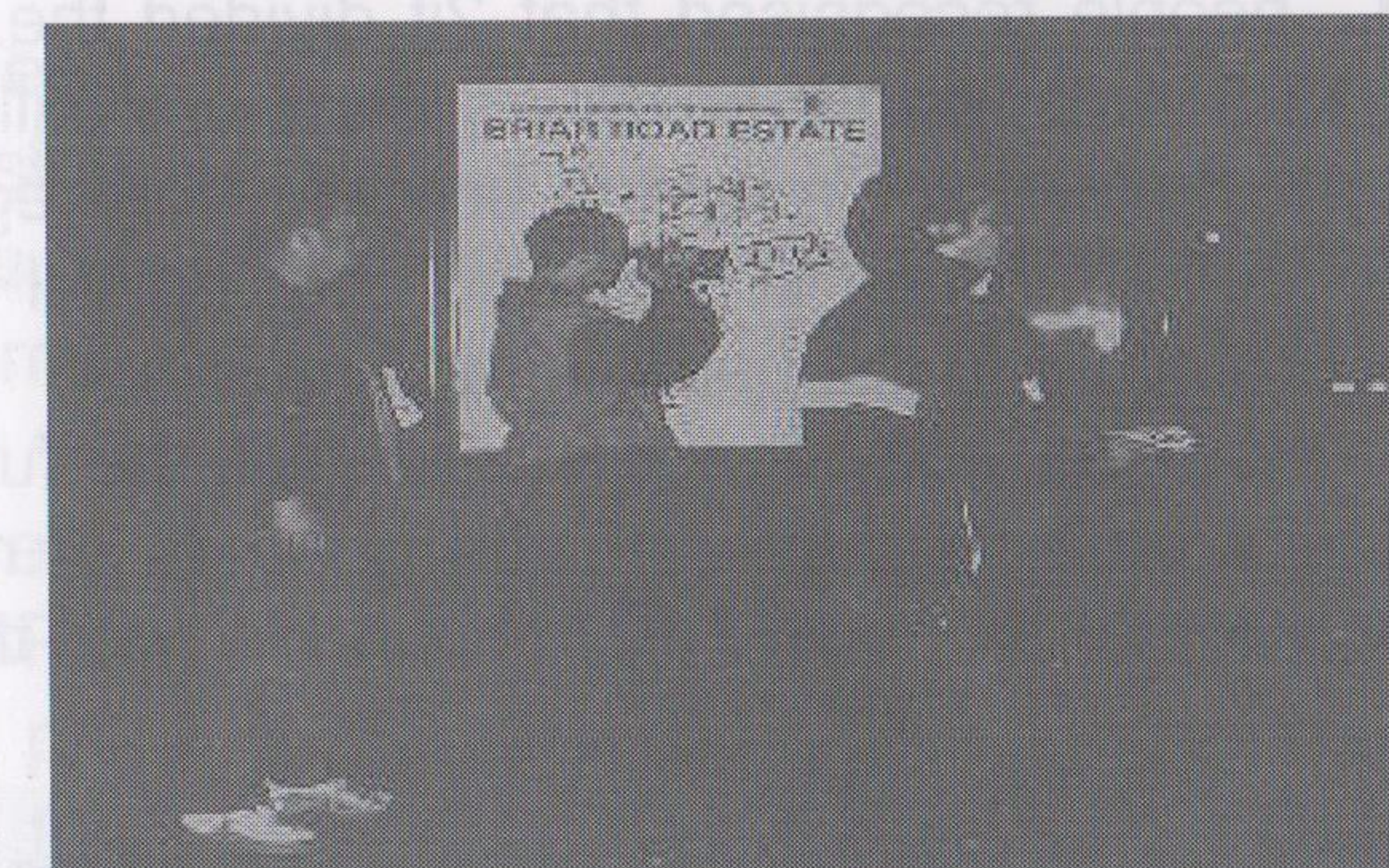
# Police



At present the police nationally cost almost £9 billion a year. But do we get value for money? In all too many areas the perception of people on the ground is that working class areas have been abandoned.

Meanwhile the police constantly call for more money and more recruits even though some surveys show that as few as 5% are on duty at any one time. Even then, they rarely serve the needs of and are not accountable to, working class communities. On one level there is apparent police indifference to antisocial behaviour and on another we are witnessing the militarisation of the police.

The police are not seen as being a part of the community but as a separate and external agency with interests and an agenda of its own. To work effectively a police service must be in the ownership of the people.



Faced with indifference from their Labour councillors and disinterest from the police, residents from Harold Hill, a working class district of the London borough of Havering, turned to the IWCA for help with a growing level of street violence and anti-social behaviour in the area. The IWCA organised public meetings (Below) to hold the police to account and galvanise support for independent community initiatives such as citizens patrols (Above) aimed at reclaiming the streets for local people.

## This means:

- **Police forces must be representative of the communities they serve**
- **The police must be community-based**
- **Police forces need to be made directly accountable to local community forums incorporating councillors, tenant association representatives, and youth workers**
- **All investigations into complaints against police deaths in custody or unlawful killing should be conducted by what is accepted as a totally independent body**

## The IWCA calls for:

- **The police to return to being a civic service**
- **50% of any future additional police funding to be diverted to youth provision in the most neglected communities, starting with the 8,000 plus wards identified in the government's own index**



(Bottom) In Newtown, Birmingham, muggings reached a level that simply could not be ignored. Only when the community, assisted by the IWCA, began organising themselves against the muggers did the police take an interest by harassing the organisers of a large march that took place through the area.



# Race & class



For many years racism was opposed because people recognised that it divided the working class. Increasingly, however, there are calls for the state funding of religious schools, for segregated schooling and for segregated housing. All of which is promoted in the name of anti-racism.

However, experience shows that the funding of social projects purely on the grounds of race can only foster an us and them scenario, with the result

that instead of being united by anti-racism, the working class can just as easily be divided by it. Multiculturalism, which insists everyone be treated differently, also undermines the concept of fairness at the core of anti-racism. For example, in America recent research has found that the application of the multicultural strategy has increased segregation in many cities and created a black middle class, often directly at the expense of the black working class.

**The IWCA is against any strategies that artificially divide the working class against itself. In order to rectify past mistakes there will need to be recognition that:**

- Orthodox models of equal opportunities racialise social questions in such a way as to set communities against each other
- Equal opportunities models which assume there is a uniform access to power by all white people and a uniform denial of access to power by all black people must be rejected
- Systematic cuts in youth and community

provision and a subsequent rise in racial tension are often linked by a straightforward relationship of cause and effect

- Anti-racist strategies that are not broadly accepted as reasonable and rational by working class communities are counter-productive and can deflect attempts to tackle the most extreme forms of bigotry
- Multicultural strategies which promote or result in segregation, particularly in housing and schooling, must be scrapped
- Organised and systematic racial violence needs to be dealt with from a political as well as criminal perspective

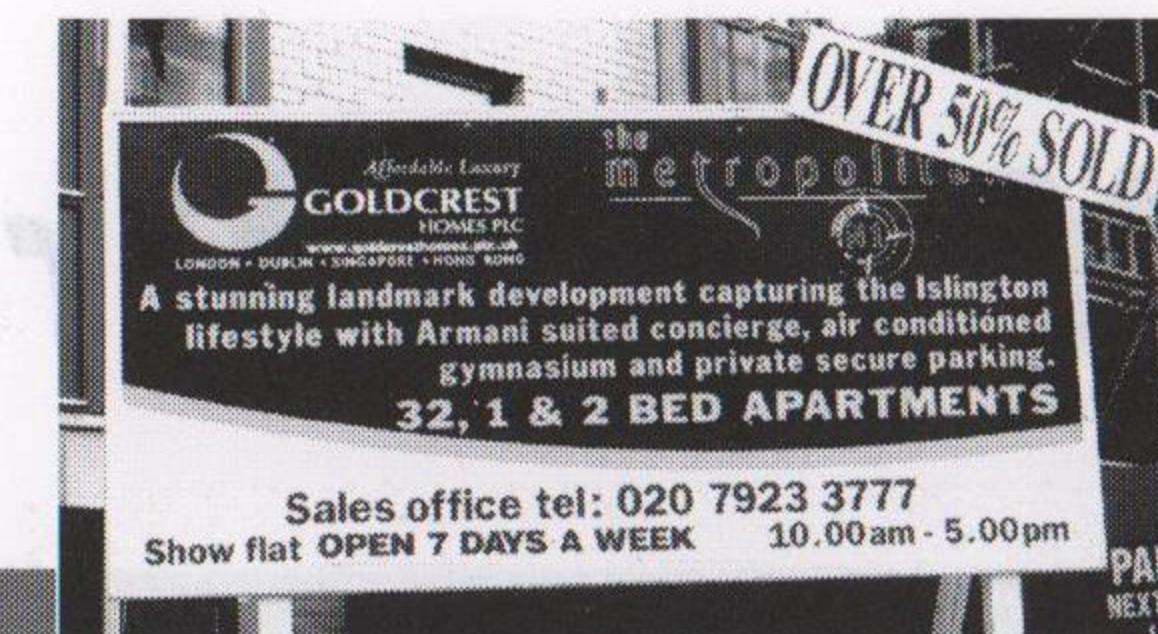
# Asylum seekers & immigration

As with official anti-racism, immigration and asylum policy can prove similarly divisive. As a rule political refugees are housed in the most under-funded areas which are duly expected to share out already meagre resources with the new arrivals. Across the country, the government is shown to have repeatedly short-changed councils to whom refugees are allocated. The interests, concerns and sensitivities of local communities are also routinely dismissed. Unsurprisingly this can be a source of suspicion, tension and resentment.

**The IWCA will fight for:**

- The allocation of political refugees to areas that can most easily accommodate them
- Consultation with local communities regarding new arrivals
- Appropriate financial compensation from government to local authorities
- Additional government grants to facilitate integration
- Extra housing provision to take account of any extra demands on housing stock
- The safeguarding of tenants' positions on existing housing lists
- The right to work or study for political refugees while their claims for citizenship are being processed

# Regeneration



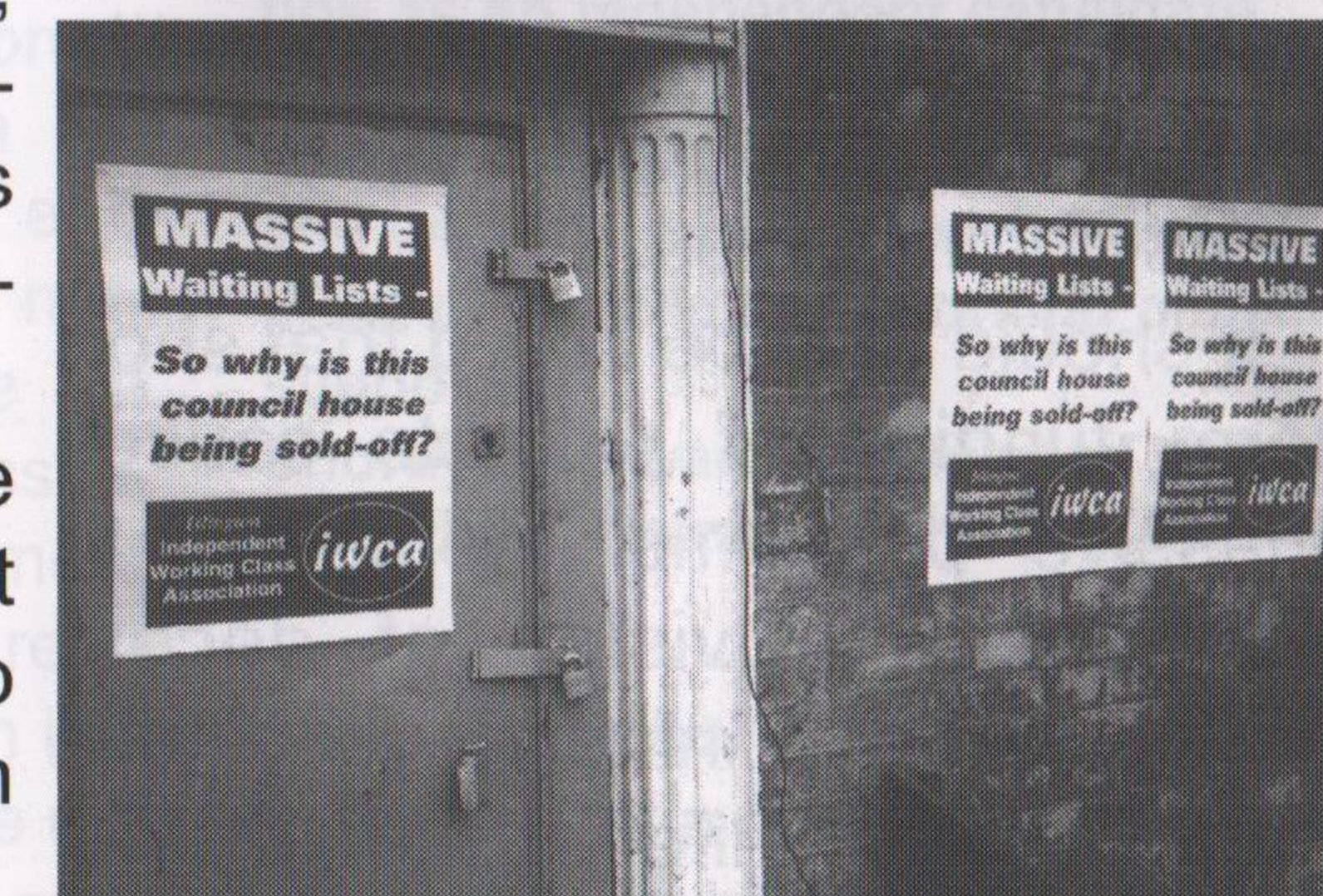
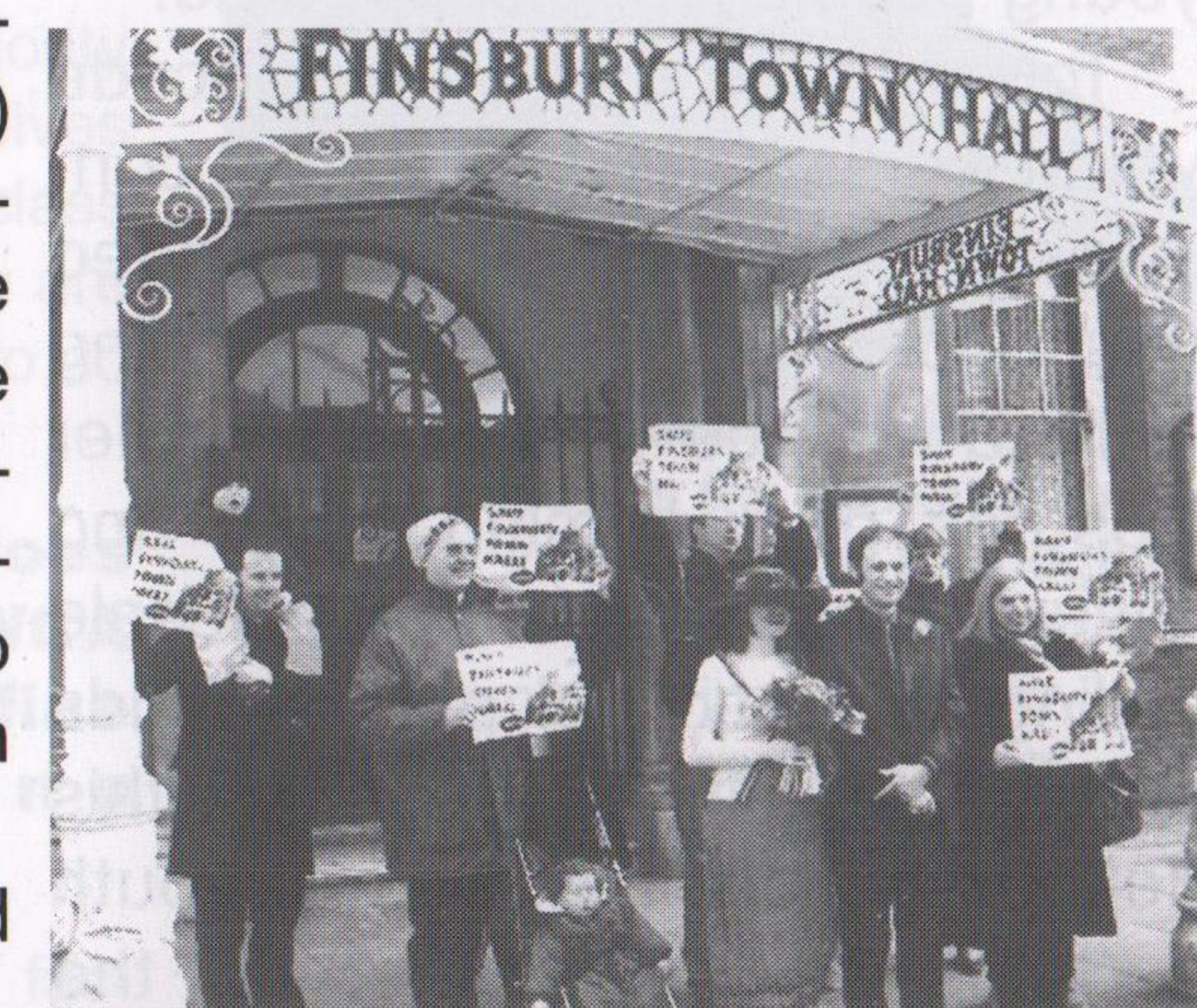
Regeneration strategies such as the New Deal have been launched by the government as a means of revitalising Britain's most deprived communities. Millions of pounds of public money being made available to working class communities should be something to be welcomed.

However, with the Government decreeing that the main vehicle for change will be Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) consisting of councils, police authorities, health boards, private enterprise etc plus a few community representatives, the reality is usually that decisions and resources remain in the hands of the big boys. Quite literally, the local elected community reps are often out-numbered, out-voted or out-manoeuvred by the political and professional classes who dominate the regeneration industry, ensuring the old top-down approach prevails.

In addition, where deprived neighbourhoods are located within particularly sought after inner city and riverside areas, the word 'regeneration' has become synonymous with 'gentrification' as council tenants are forced out and their homes either demolished or privatised in order to make way for exclusive luxury developments.

As an alternative, the IWCA supports the call from some community-based development workers for the establishment of a National Neighbourhood Fund which would lead to greater democracy and empowerment within regeneration strategies.

In Islington, London, the Liberal Democrat councils' idea of 'regenerating' the borough has included the sale of the area's registry office (Below) and numerous council homes (Bottom) to developers so they can be turned into luxury 'yuppie' apartments, further gentrifying this working class area.



**The IWCA fights for:**

- All decision-making members of local regeneration bodies to be elected by a ballot of the local community
- The role of various un-elected consultants, council representatives and 'partners' to be restricted to an advisory capacity to be called upon if and when the elected community representatives require them
- The quick release of regeneration money to allow it to flow into supporting the various existing community and voluntary networks, as well as initiating new, urgently-needed schemes
- For local councils and Government office to give an undertaking that they would not seek to undermine any position arrived at by the local regeneration body which has been shown to have genuine community backing

**As an alternative to present national regeneration strategies, the IWCA supports:**

- The establishment of a National Neighbourhood Fund empowered to allocate money to neighbourhood trusts in every deprived area
- The devolving of powers to neighbourhood trusts to set local targets and then distribute grants to community projects to pursue them
- The election of members of the neighbourhood trusts, to take place within their respective areas. Neighbourhood trusts would elect members of the National Neighbourhood Fund

# Youth Provision



During the 1980s successive waves of cuts in public spending meant thousands of adventure playgrounds, drop-in centres and play centres for children and young people just disappeared.

Towards the end of the decade youth workers, who often had contact with difficult and damaged young people, saw their funding withdrawn. Add to this the further closures of swimming pools and leisure centres and the wholesale selling-off of school playing fields and it is not difficult to see how this deliberate decimation of youth services has contributed to the breakdown of social cohesion within already hard-pressed working class communities.

It should also be noted that short term funding of projects causes massive problems. Returning to permanent provision of decent services would instantly lead to a better quality of life for people of all ages.



(Left) IWCA members in Islington, London, petitioning against the closure of holiday play schemes in an area plagued with anti-social behaviour and youth crime. The cuts to play scheme funding came shortly after the IWCA revealed that Liberal Democrat councillors were paying themselves and their staff £800,000 a year from council coffers.

## The IWCA advocates:

- **The immediate establishment of a network of youth services within each of the 8,000 wards featured with in the government's own poverty index, backed-up by sustained, long-term funding**
- **A special emphasis placed on providing the training necessary to allow young people from the local community to fill youth work positions themselves**
- **After-school clubs, half-term and summer play schemes to be openly available to all regardless of income**
- **Free access to leisure facilities for all under 18s**

# Women & Childcare



Despite the promotion of feminism for over thirty years the empowerment women have enjoyed has been largely restricted to middle class career women.

There needs to be recognition that in working class communities women are often at the forefront of campaigns and are the best placed to improve the communities they live in.

However, it also needs to be recognised that an absence of universal childcare provision is the primary stumbling block in preventing the majority of working class mothers enjoying a richer life by playing a full role in their communities.

## IWCA policy objectives are:

- **Free childcare for 1-12 year olds from 7am-7pm, Monday to Friday**
- **The widespread expansion of drop-in childcare facilities**
- **Direct involvement of local women in the planning and setting up of all aspects of after-school clubs and child care facilities**

# Question Time

Below Neil Stanton, who is Chair of the IWCA's National Coordinating Committee, answers some of the most frequently asked questions about the IWCA.



Neil Stanton is the spokesman for the IWCA in the London Borough of Havering. A former constituency chairman of Upminster Labour Party, Neil had also stood as a Labour candidate, before resigning from the party. He then stood in a council by-election as an independent candidate against Labour, in protest at the party's continuing rightward drift and what he saw as their abandonment of their former working class supporters. Shortly afterwards he formed the Harold Hill branch of the IWCA.

## How did the IWCA come about?

In the mid-1990s following the removal of Clause Four from the constitution of the Labour Party a number of people sat down to discuss the likely political ramifications. One calculation was the collapse of the Labour Party as an organisation with mass working class support. Another was that without a political voice the working class would go down the route of its American counterparts and become politically extinct.

After lengthy discussion it was decided there was a need for a new type of organisation. But rather than mimic existing political parties a series of pilot schemes were set up around the country in order to test and refine the theory, strategy and tactics.

In September 2001 the Independent Working Class Association became a registered political party. Less than a year later we had our first councillor.

## Is the IWCA socialist?

Well, in the context of those who would still describe themselves as socialist - from New Labour to the student left - the answer has to be no.

It is only necessary to look at the history of the 20th century to conclude that socialism has failed. Many socialists give the impression that it is the working class who have failed the left. However, if blame were to be attributed it would be more realistic to conclude that it is the left who have failed the working class. In any case we are in a new century now and many of the old dogmas are no longer relevant. We need fresh thinking, fresh strategies and fresh tactics.

**When he was Prime Minister, John Major argued that Britain was already a 'classless society'. New Labour have put a slightly different take on this, arguing that 'we're all middle class now'. So in terms of numbers how relevant is the working class today?**

Now on one level the answer is fairly straightforward. When people think of themselves in terms of class they tend to think in terms of background, education, occupation, income, and culture. According to recent research, if people are asked those questions in Britain today, the overwhelming majority define themselves as 'working class'. And when you consider that only 7% of all school children go to private schools it is easy to see

why the majority view themselves as working class and why they are also correct to do so.

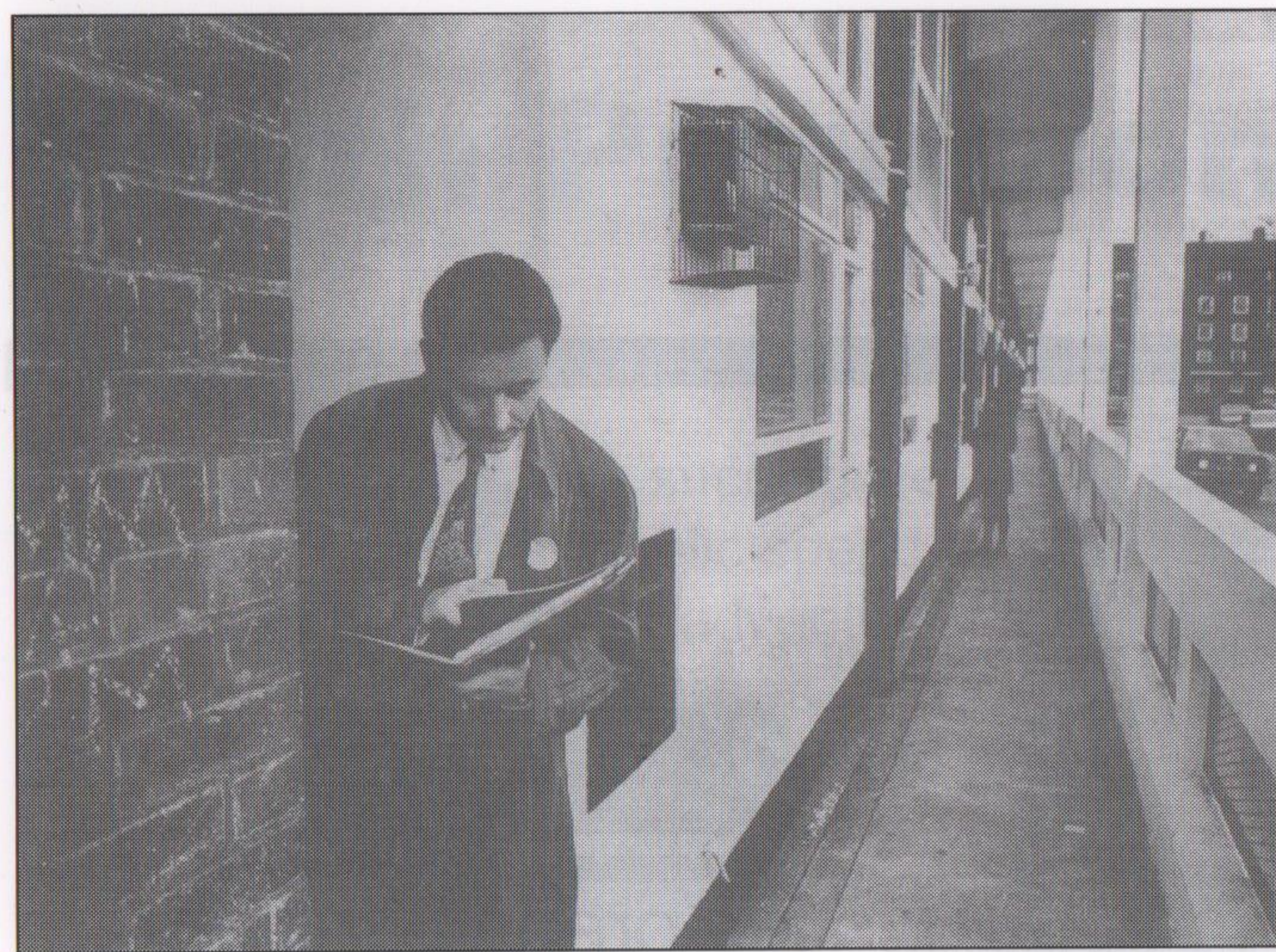
## But how does the IWCA itself define 'working class'?

While the factors mentioned earlier such as income and background naturally have a bearing, class is defined most easily by the relationship of an individual to his or her work. Now it must be said, there may sometimes be a difference between what people are and what they think they are. A managing director might work to maximise production but his income is nonetheless largely derived from the work of others. This can work the other way as well.

A recent court case witnessed an attempt to restrict the term 'working class' to those involved in manual work only. While by any standards to try and include the managing director would be too broad a definition, to insist on blue-collar workers only would be far too narrow. It could for instance classify those working on the checkout in a supermarket as non-manual and by default middle class, while shelf stackers under the same wage and conditions would be defined as manual and thus working class. So clearly the thinking behind the white-collar/blue-collar grading is deeply flawed, particularly when you see that bank clerks, nurses, and even teachers, who in the past would have been considered middle class, are today in terms of pay and conditions far nearer to those occupations that are considered firmly working class.

Ultimately the core working class fall into two main categories: those whose work produces a direct profit for their employer (obviously by no means just blue-collar workers) and those engaged in supplementary





“ Quite rightly, a significant proportion of the population now view conventional ‘electoral parties’ as a group of very cynical, professional politicians who turn up on your doorstep every four years or so to ask for your vote and then disappear off to the town hall, never to be seen again ”

occupations essential to the functioning of the economy who put in long hours for low pay. Most often these are the same people who most want change and so serve as the natural constituency of the IWCA.

#### So is the IWCA only interested in people on low pay or benefit?

Not only, because as we pointed out before, we believe the working class make up the majority of people in Britain. And as this is the case, it is vitally important that at all times the IWCA is, and is seen to be, at the disposal of the entire class. For having abandoned the working class and no longer attempting to organise it, the Labour party is not neutral but, in tandem with other middle class parties, is instead actively organising to undermine the interests of its former constituency. So apart from our own initiatives, organisation and agenda, the IWCA must reach out to become a focal point and political centre for authentic working class struggles on an all-island basis.

#### What, in political terms, is meant by the phrase ‘working class independence’?

At the heart of the IWCA lies the principle of self-determination. By this we mean that the working class must take an active role in determining its future. At present the political set-up no longer concerns itself with the interests of working class people. Therefore, we must begin to look after our own interests. Putting it simply, liberal democracy has failed the working class.

#### How is this failure reflected?

It is reflected in a number of ways: In the on-going privatisation of society; in the ever widening gap between rich and poor; in the turn-out at the last general election; and in the rise of the ultra right.

Taken together it shows that the interests, concerns and aspirations of working class people have not been in the past, will not be in the future, and realistically ought never to have been expected to be, represented by middle class agendas, ideologies and parties.

In addition, it is fairly common knowledge that the major parties - Labour, Liberal Democrat and Tories - all vie with each other for the votes of what is called ‘middle England’. By and large they do so not by championing the sectional interests of this grouping in opposition to big business but by promoting its interests in opposition to the less well off - the classic strategy of divide and rule.

Accordingly, where the mainstream parties set their face against the working class it is not unreasonable for the working class to be against all mainstream parties. We have already seen the lowest turn-out (since women got the vote in 1918) in the 2001 general election. Obviously, where it is perceived only middle England is represented, increasingly only middle England will vote. It follows, therefore that if the decline of working class participation in political affairs is to be arrested the only sensible way forward is for the working class to have an organisation free from all establishment parties and institutions.

#### ‘Working class rule in working class areas’ is described as an interim objective. Can you explain what you mean by this?

By and large working class people have become accustomed to being represented by councillors and parties that come from outside the areas they govern and, more pertinently, from outside the working class of which they themselves are a part. While these parties may claim a democratic mandate, more often than not they get by through sharing out between them the vote of the small minority who still participate in council elections, which leads to the suspicion they have actually come to rely on as much as 80% of the electorate not taking part. This means that where a party like the IWCA is able to convince enough people in between elections that with their support we can make a difference, the electoral impact caused by the return of these previously disillusioned non-voters can cause what were assumed to be unassailable majorities to crumble overnight.

Such a development at the grassroots is vitally important because before the working class can expect to return to the national stage as an independent force we must first learn to do so locally. This is why one of the strategic aims the IWCA is geared toward the ‘re-conquest of working class neighbourhoods by working class people’. It goes without saying that in the absence of the social foundation of working class rule in working class areas, radical change may be possible but progressive change seems inconceivable.

#### But how can one or two IWCA councillors here or there expect to change anything?

You’re right of course. A lone IWCA councillor con-

fronted by the closed ranks of the old parties cannot expect to change how the council is run overnight, but he or she can change how the ward they represent is run from the minute they are elected. So there is an obvious and immediate return for the working class people who have elected them. And while accepting that outside of what he or she may be able to do for his or her constituents an IWCA councillor may be unable to wield real power, the demonstration of a working class that is thinking, organising, and acting independently does tend to shake up the middle class incumbents of the other parties. For the simple reason that many individuals who vote IWCA may not otherwise have voted, the other parties realise the IWCA can tap into a constituency over which they cannot hope to have any influence. Accordingly, they tend to see every single vote for the IWCA in the context of what it might mean for them in the longer term and it frightens them. Simply by putting up candidates the IWCA can have a positive affect on the performance of the council as a whole because the mainstream parties know that if they don’t improve there is someone who will replace them.

#### Is the IWCA an electoral party?

While the IWCA has contested a number of elections in areas where we have built a base of support we would not view ourselves merely as an ‘electoral’ party. First and foremost the IWCA sees itself as a campaigning party, fighting on those issues which are of most concern to working class people - regardless of whether there is an election just around the corner - and we believe our track record so far supports that claim. Quite rightly, a significant proportion of the population now view conventional ‘electoral parties’ as a group of very cynical, professional politicians who turn up on your doorstep every four years or so to ask for your vote and then disappear off to the town hall, never to be seen again.

That said, the IWCA certainly sees elections as another battlefield on which to engage the mainstream parties. For instance, there is no way we are going to be working hard in an area only to step aside at election time to allow the usual collection of charlatans, carpet-baggers and careerists a free run. We want people to be left in no doubt that we are not just a pressure group complaining about this closure or that cut, only to

get behind the ‘lesser evil’ at election time. We want these people voted out, but failing that, we aim to ensure that they at least know they’ve been in a fight and are forced to come out, face the community, and defend their sorry record in public.

#### Can the IWCA ensure its representatives will not get sucked into ‘the establishment’ and become as corrupt as the other parties?

It is true that some people think that by merely standing for election your principles are somehow already compromised. However corruption, double-dealing and being two-faced is not inevitable. The reasons why the mainstream parties often appear strangers to the truth are fairly easily explained. As we see it, the membership of the mainstream parties is increasingly made up of middle class people, while the bulk of the electorate comprises people who consider themselves working class.

Which means so long as the mainstream parties continue to present their policies as ‘being good’ for big business, middle England and ordinary people, though the interests of each are often in direct conflict, they are more or less forced to be economical with the truth simply in order to get elected. Furthermore, as a consequence of all the mainstream parties sharing the same objectives there is the tendency to focus on the minor detail while hav-

ing a gentlemen’s agreement not to exploit the issues that most concern the electorate. Rather than reason with ordinary people they opt instead to try and manipulate them. All of which has caused the cynicism with which the major parties are regarded to run at an all time high, leading many to conclude that politicians are ‘only in it for themselves’.

By contrast, rather than pretend to be ‘all things to all people’, the IWCA founding statement makes clear that the singular purpose of the IWCA is ‘to pursue the political and economic interests’ of the working class without ‘consideration for the consequences to the existing economic structures’. This is where the IWCA is different. As working class political independence is both the stated means and the objective, so even issues of universal concern such as the environment are looked at from that perspective. The task we have set ourselves is to fight the corner of the working class pure and simple. So there is no pandering to rival class interests. Thus the handicap of having to say one thing but



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do another that besets all the other parties does not arise for the IWCA. But if this is not sufficient deterrent to those individuals who might be motivated only by furthering their own careers or lining their own pockets, we have put in place some further safeguards.

First, perhaps uniquely, the IWCA structure and constitution ensures the real power within the organisation lies with its rank-and-file members. Which means that if any IWCA representative betrays the stated principles when in office they can be quickly and easily removed. Second, and more specifically, rules in the constitution bar any of our members who are voted into electoral office pocketing the large salaries that councillors like to award themselves nowadays.

**Does 'working class rule in working class areas' involve more than just running the council?**

Well to a certain extent councils with limited ability to raise revenue through taxes and so on have very little real power. They are in many ways mere administrators for national government. And while this is clearly wrong it will, until challenged politically, continue to be the case.

In the meantime our political task is to make the existing system conform to the wishes of the people it is constitutionally accountable to. Where, over time, a system of administration has proved itself hostile to the interests of the local population, then the community will have to face up to the challenge of replacing it with the type of administration that adequately reflects its interests.

**So what type of administration do you think would adequately reflect working class interests?**

Well, in the situation we have at present, where all the establishment parties seem agreed that, what in previous generations were considered basic human rights - the right to work, the right to decent housing, to adequate health care, the right to silence or even trial by jury - have to be abandoned to meet the interests of the system, this is a tall order.

When on top of this you are faced with a situation in many working class areas where the police fail to offer

effective protection from crime within the community, it is clear something must be done. Politicians often argue when police fail to respond to routine calls in working class areas it is down to lack of manpower. But this is not necessarily the case. More often it is to do with the police deciding other, usually better off areas, must take precedence. This is a situation that is not likely to improve so the community must put up with it or step in to fill the vacuum here too. What this means is that the onus is on the community to protect itself from the criminal element, and in some cases as a consequence, particularly in drug-related crime, from victimisation by the police.

**Doesn't all this leave the IWCA open to the charge of vigilantism?**

It does, but what we are actually talking about is something entirely different. In repeated surveys in the disparate areas in which the IWCA has run pilot schemes, crime has come top of the agenda. This reflects the fact that fear of crime has a deeply corrosive effect on working class people as they suffer from it disproportionately, but as well as that, their inability to compel the authorities to respond makes them despair of real progress being achieved in any other area either.

Over time the affect is hugely demoralising, causing many to retreat from any active political, community or even social engagement as a result. So obviously this is an area of concern that must be addressed.

There is, in addition, a growing perception that the policy of the police in regard to working class communities is one of 'contain and control', whereby hard drug dealing and the serious anti-social behaviour that inevitably follows are controlled by being contained within working class communities. Where that happens, as well as being a criminal problem it also becomes a political problem and, again, this is an issue that an organisation like the IWCA simply cannot duck. Put simply, to enjoy the support and confidence of local communities, whoever polices the community must be accountable to that community. Clearly that is one of the cornerstones of any democratic administration.

**Can you give another illustration of how 'working class rule in working class areas'**

**might turn things around?**

Take housing for example. If a borough has 2000 homeless and three times as many empty properties then simple division should provide an instant solution. But what has happened over the last twenty-five years is that there has been a decisive change in the priorities of the governing parties, and with this has come the tendency for politicians to place the stress on the obligations of individuals as tenants, parents and citizens while at the same time ignoring, diluting or sidestepping their own statutory obligations. But where a system will not, or cannot, administer positively in allocating decent housing then is it reasonable to stand by as it administers negatively, in terms of rent arrears, bailiffs, evictions and so on? The answer must be no.

And obviously, if because of decisions taken at national level, local government cannot be made to work in accordance with the wishes of the electorate then 'local democracy' has no meaning. For democracy to be given real meaning under these conditions administration must become the act of the working class itself: de facto self-government.

**Once again can you explain what you mean by working class 'self-government'?**

Under Thatcher, a series of changes in local government funding took place whereby funding was increasingly doled out and, all importantly, controlled by central government. This has caused two things to happen: on the one hand an absence of proper funding for working class areas has seen the infrastructure which previously catered for people's needs devastated, with the 'savings' made through the cuts being returned to the better off in the form of tax concessions.

And along with the inability to provide proper services, we have also seen the tendency to ever-larger wards with a correspondingly greater gap between councillors and the people who elected them. Along with these two fundamental reverses, the role of elected councillors in the decision-making process has been minimised; the substitute is a 'cabinet' style system where as few as nine councillors decide on who gets what. Priorities again. Needless to say, this erosion of democratic accountability will, at some stage in the future, see the need for any form of representative government at all at the local level being called into question. Already well-salaried cabinet-run councils are regarded in some quarters as a preparation for affairs at a local level being administered by un-elected appointees.

It is a trend that, should it continue, will see working class people confronted with the choice of either self-government and democracy, or no services and no democracy.

**Will the privatisation of public services not have an impact on the political parties who support it?**

Undoubtedly this will prove to be the case.

Particularly as all the main-stream parties continue to look for more and more ways to divest responsibility from the state and onto the private sector at a speed previously unimaginable. We can see the process at work across the board, in hospitals, schools, housing, and policing. Naturally as they abandon responsibility for sections of the population socially they will be forced as a consequence to abandon (an increasingly paramilitary police force apart) these areas territorially as well - just like the Tory party, which has practically no say in any working class areas now.

Labour too is destined to lose all influence with this constituency. 1997 was arguably the last election in which Labour candidates campaigned in working class areas with any real confidence. What this means is that organisations who still seek to influence events in working class areas will do so largely free of competition from the mainstream parties. That is not to say that the establishment parties will just disappear, but equally, popular support for their policies will continue to fall. For those determined to build a political alternative in working class communities this represents a gigantic and historic opportunity.

**So how will the IWCA respond politically to the situation described?**



**“ There is a growing perception that the policy of the police in regard to working class communities is one of 'contain and control', whereby hard drug dealing and the serious anti-social behaviour that inevitably follows are controlled by being contained within working class communities.**

**Whoever polices the community, must be accountable to that community. Clearly that is one of the cornerstones of any democratic administration. ”**

As the state gradually withdraws from areas of social responsibility, rather than condemn their desertion and plead for them to come back, the IWCA will seek to fill the void both socially and politically.

So in any area where the establishment wants to break the working class from reliance on the state socially - 'break the culture of dependency' - rather than rely entirely on an often futile resistance we must instead seek to compliment this development by bringing it a step further and using the momentum to break the working class from any reliance or allegiance to the state politically. What we mean by this is not the rejection of existing state social provision but the working class taking increasing responsibility for all areas of policy implemented in its name.

**So on the one hand, the IWCA rejects this government's policies on issues such as drugs, anti-social behaviour and policing, and on the other insists these issues cannot be ignored?**

We reject the government's policies on these issues, firstly because we believe they are not effective in addressing the problem and secondly because we believe the impact of these policies on working class communities can actually prove to be counter-productive.

Moreover, unlike some liberals, we do not believe anybody attempting to address these issues can automatically be considered reactionary. On the contrary, the IWCA has a proven track record of responding to issues such as drug dealing and antisocial behaviour in our communities.

The real challenge for anybody involved in progressive working class politics is to develop short, mid and long-term strategies that can begin to address what is a massive issue within our communities. Make no mistake, any party seeking to represent the interests of working class people who ignores these problems or simply pretends they do not exist will not be taken seriously by them, and rightly so.

**'Total social change' is presented as the ultimate IWCA objective. Can you explain in precise terms what is meant by this expression?**

Well, in the economic arena, in dealing with what are otherwise presented as intractable problems, from pensions to railways, the private sector is constantly promoted as the ultimate saviour. But if the privatisation principle holds good in the economic sphere it would be illogical to deny its vitality in the political sphere.

And it is not denied. Increasingly, the model at national and local level is government by the few for, inevitably, the betterment of the few. In short, minority rule in minority interests.

The alternative vision is the democratisation of both politics and the economy: 'total social change'. The means to bring it about is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority.

**What future role do you see for trade unions strategically?**

Britain was the first industrialised country. Industrialisation drew people from the land to the cities, and today we are going through a similar metamorphosis in reverse. The collapse of large-scale industry such as mining, steel and shipbuilding has not only rendered the industries redundant but has also led to the methods of resistance, like trade unions, becoming defunct as well.

Millions of workers now operate in businesses employing 25 people or less. Understandably, though they might personally benefit from being in a union, collective bargaining through trade union representation is not an option for them.

Unions too have adapted themselves by operating more like businesses, offering pensions and private health care to potential recruits. And again, while this may benefit the individual member, there is no longer any wider social or political role whereby unions can advance the interests of the working class as a whole.

**Yet the IWCA itself has been described as a 'trade union for the community'?**

Yes, and it is a description that is accurate to the extent that much of the time IWCA work can involve dealing with the failure of the authorities to listen to the local community or carry out their statutory responsibilities, in regard to basic safety, maintenance and

repairs in the properties that are under their control. As none of the mainstream parties are consistent on such issues it often falls to the IWCA to take the council to task on behalf of those in the affected community. It is also impossible to talk of greater advances on other fronts if 'bread and butter' issues are ignored.

**Liberals would argue that certain IWCA policies could be construed as 'racist'. How do you respond to such allegations?**

The IWCA is not a racist organisation. For us, skin colour is of little relevance politically so we do not feel morally obliged to support aspects of race-related policies with which we do not agree, particularly when we believe them to be wrongheaded and divisive. Examples abound.

Up until around 1980 anti-racism was all about opposing discrimination on the grounds of colour or nationality: 'treating everyone the same'. It was a limited measure but contained an element of fairness most people understood then and would probably agree with today. Since then, under the banners of 'identity politics', 'positive discrimination' and 'promotion of diversity', agendas have been adopted for treating different races differently.

This has led among other things to the case being made for separate housing and schooling; in other words for racial exclusivity. All too predictably this perception of preferential treatment has resulted in confusion and serious resentment.

In general terms, however, both politicians and the media present racism as the last great injustice and, as a consequence, justify the drive to push race to the forefront of practically every debate. In the process society has become increasingly 'racialised'. And while it is accepted that racialisation is not always a welcome development, it is often defended in the erroneous belief that white people are 'inherently racist'. We believe this to be wrong.

Equally flawed is the tendency to ignore social and economic factors and use ethnicity alone to identify or solve problems. Inevitably, a one-sided view can just as easily serve to conceal as reveal just solutions.

Take, for instance, the most recent example. The Department of Education released figures in March 2003 showing that while only 30% of black Caribbean children sitting GCSEs got top grades, 51% of white students did so. This was automatically presented as damning evidence of racism, followed by a government promise to improve performances for ethnic minority students generally. But, when examined, the statistics point to a different conclusion.

A closer study of the evidence shows that in all, just 42,146 black Caribbean students sat for GCSEs in 2002. Of these 70% were deemed to be un-academic. Although the rate of underachievement among white children was lower, at 49%, this percentage was extracted from a total of 2,707,404 students. The official conclusions ignore the fact that the latter group was

more than 60 times larger than the former.

Put another way, if almost one in two white children across all classes do not get top grades, it is a level of failure that can only be explained by factors other than racism. To reinforce that point you also have the 73% and 64% success ratio achieved by children from Chinese and Indian origin, while Pakistani children are 24% less successful than Indian students.

**Does this not show different levels of ability in different national groups?**

No, but it does demolish the arguments of official anti-racism which can make no sense of such disparities, as they choose to ignore the overwhelming social and economic inequality that make up the bigger picture. In reality the relative underachievement of Caribbean and Pakistani children is a straightforward symptom of wider under-funding combined with a pre-existing disadvantage that affects all working class children. Other reports show that children from middle class homes are three times more likely to achieve five good GCSEs than classmates from less well-off households, and that family income delivers 66% of GCSE results. It is also now accepted that sometime in the mid 1970s social mobility stalled and went into reverse, which means the class you are born into is increasingly the class you stay in. As the statistics demonstrate, this applies to those from immigrant groups as well as everyone else.

**Isn't lack of social mobility what New Labour was elected to remedy?**

Yes many thought so, but to be effective it would require the disadvantage suffered by the entire working class to be reversed to have any effect.

Labour has no stomach for such a radical overhaul so they opt instead for a smaller, less expensive and more tactically advantageous target: the racial quota. This is, at best, a superficial approach that addresses the effects but not the real causes of the effects.

**But don't all the major parties support the multicultural approach?**

Yes, there is generally cross party support for parity among racial groups but it is largely related to self interest: a strong black and Asian middle class helps reinforce the existing white middle class, the mainstay of the Labour, Lib-Dem and Tory parties, and as a result seen as the support base for the social and political status quo.

A by-product of constantly emphasising apparent disparities between racial groups is that it can also serve to camouflage what they have in common, with the result that the poor are set against the poor in the name of anti-racism. In brief, while other parties rush to put social issues in a racial context the IWCA believes the greater truth is revealed through placing racial issues in a social context.

Which is why the IWCA will instinctively continue to oppose policies that discriminate against, divide, or serve in any way to weaken the working class as a



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movement. As we have seen, prior to the 1980s the argument was that everyone should be treated the same. In our view politics would be more clear-cut, the solutions more straightforward and democracy healthier if genuine anti-racists restricted themselves to that original message.

**Where does the IWCA come down on the question of immigration?**

In Britain today the gap between the rich and poor is



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ever greater and, in terms of housing, health and education, the provision of resources is wholly inadequate.

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Given the way society is structured, it succeeds only in polarising the argument along the lines of nationality or race, often setting the poor against the poor, while leaving the decisive question of how resources are allocated and priorities defined fundamentally unchanged. Moreover, if in the near future Britain fully integrates within an expanding European Union, the question of

borders in a European context will be irrelevant (meaning that all within the European Union can come and live here legally) while, nonetheless, the problem of deciding how resources are to be allocated will be acute.

As this is an evolving situation and the IWCA is an evolving organisation we will have to wait and see. In the meantime the IWCA will fight for greater resources for working class communities that play host to large numbers of political refugees and for the integration of those refugees within the community.

**How is the IWCA structured?**

Like a lot of parties the structure of the IWCA resembles a pyramid except, unlike all other parties, power resides at the bottom with the rank and file.

This is achieved by electing recallable delegates at the local level to make decisions regionally and nationally. Furthermore, officers elected at the annual general meeting, to deal with matters affecting the IWCA nationally, remain subordinate to these delegates in regard to the implementation of IWCA policy in between AGMs. Decisions at the AGM are made according to the principle of one-person one vote.

**Can anyone join the IWCA?**

Yes the IWCA is open to any working class person in Britain. This does not mean middle class people are excluded. On the contrary we welcome them as allies, but at the same time the class character of the IWCA, if it is to function politically, must remain overwhelmingly a working class one. So accommodating working class people will be our primary goal.

**Who would be regarded as an ideal IWCA recruit?**

Someone who already operates politically and is socially active in his or her working class community, sees the need for change, and is prepared to take on some responsibility for making it happen. However, we of course welcome the support of everyone regardless of how much previous organising experience they have, or the amount of time they are able to commit. Everyone has a role to play.

**What is the role of an IWCA councillor?**

He or she has two basic functions. To serve as a delegate for the people who elected them and, as an IWCA member, to bring an independent working class analysis into the heart of local government wherever that might be.

**Can you sum up the immediate political objectives of the IWCA?**

The objective of the IWCA is to make a difference rather than propaganda. Only by addressing the day-to-day concerns of the working class where they live can the IWCA help develop communities of resistance able to withstand and then politically exploit Labour's collapse as a mass working class party. It has to be done. There is no alternative •

# How to join the IWCA



Membership of the Independent Working Class Association is open to any working class person who identifies with the aims, policies and objectives of the IWCA.

write to:

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**www.iwca.info**

