

South London Stress

121 Collective members have started publishing a weekly bulletin, *South London Stress*, covering the impending eviction of 121, the redevelopment of Brixton and related matters. We intend to follow up the information in this booklet with more hard facts and details about council and private dodgy dealings, evictions, groups and spaces under threat and fighting back, and much more. Any news views and information, dirt on councillors/council officers/companies, experiences, ideas, help, are most welcome. Get in touch with us at 121.



**121 CENTRE,
121 RAILTON ROAD, BRIXTON,
LONDON, SE24 0LR**

13716

FREE

THE REAL

BRIXTON CHALLENGE



THE TRUTH ABOUT : 121 Centre Eviction
Threat - The Council & the Developers -
CCTV - The Dogstar... And Much More!

121 FACING EVICTION

On Thursday January 14th 1999, Lambeth Council was granted a possession order for the long-standing and well-known squatted anarchist centre at 121 Railton Road, Brixton. After nearly 18 years the council still claim they own the building, and were able to convince the County Court judge of this, despite a strong case from the occupiers of 121 that Lambeth had lost any title by leaving it in our control for so long.

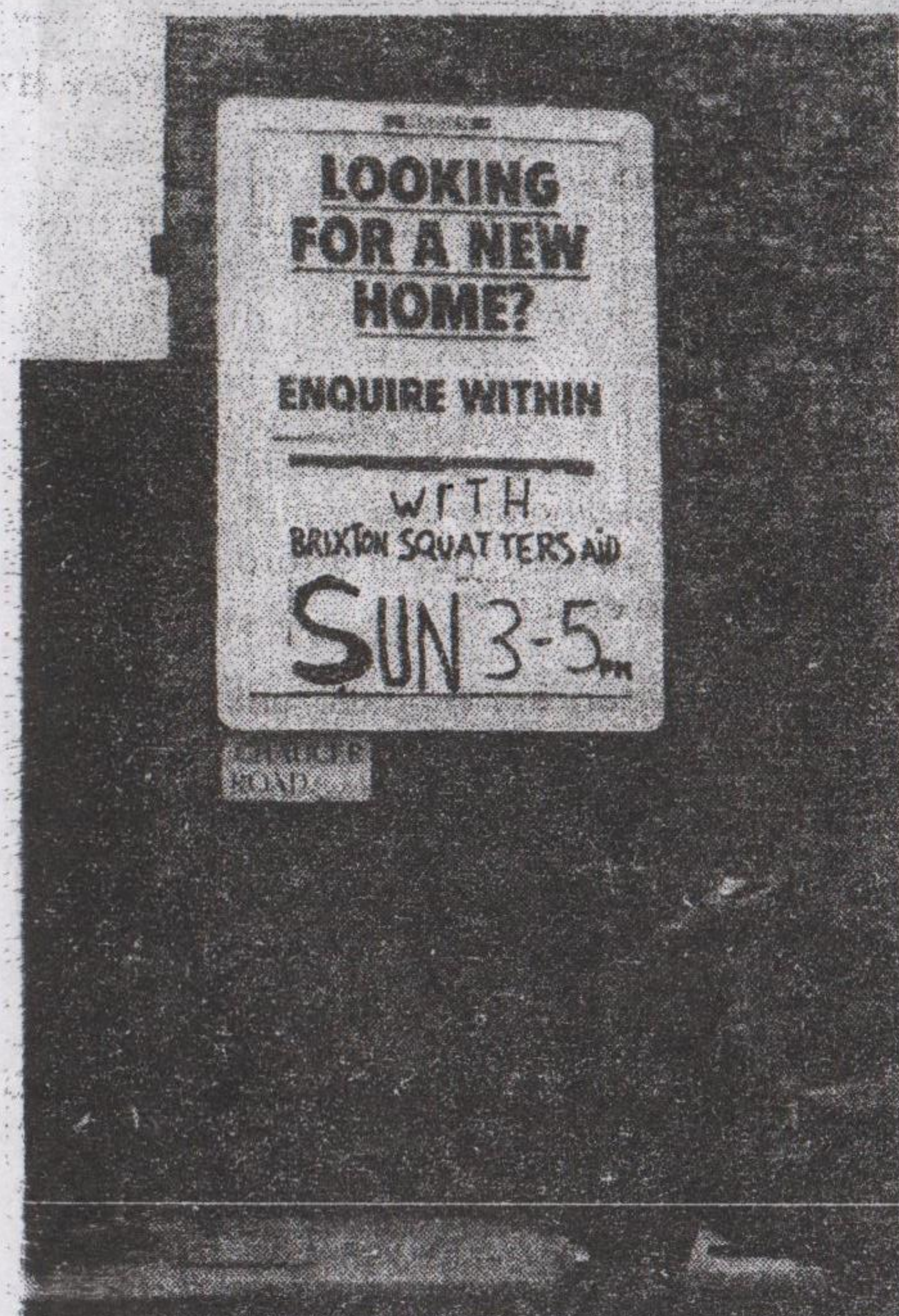
The judgement means that 121 could be evicted very soon - unless the council can be stopped.

WHOSE SPACE IS IT ANYWAY?

Since it was squatted in early 1981, the 121 has been the centre of non-stop activity. It has been used as a bookshop, cafe, library, a squatters advice centre, a meeting space for many radical, political and community groups, art gallery space...It has been an organising point & office space for people involved in local, national and international campaigns - anti-racism/anti-fascism, solidarity with strikers, against the poll tax and council cuts, supporting prisoners. Women's' groups, lesbian & gay groups, benefit claimants, have organised out of the building. 100s of newspapers, pam-

phlets and leaflets and other publications have been published and printed at 121. The centre has also been a social venue, for parties, gigs, video nights, and the famous 121 friday night club in the '80s. 1000s of people, from locals to visitors from all over the world, have passed through and used the building, made it their own. 121 has always been a space, not under the control of the council or any other official body, where people could come, find out about struggles and events, hang out.

Because the centre has consistently rejected politicians of any colour, all political parties from the Tories to Ted Knight's Labour Mafia have attacked us. We were raided by the police in 1984, and fascists tried to burn the building in 1992. None of this has stopped

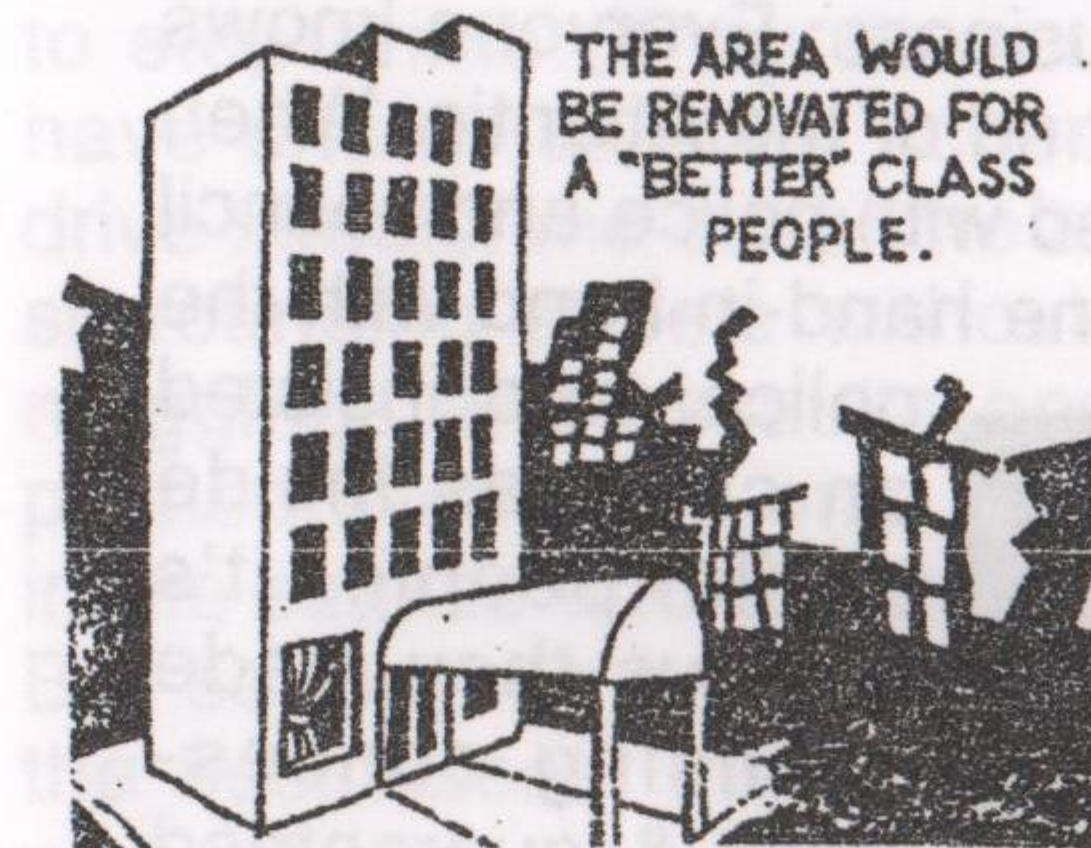


121 being involved in the fight for a better life for all.

The council want to end all this - the last thing they want is people organising for themselves. They are trying to yuppify the area, and 121 - together with any kind of streetlife, or people taking back their own lives - doesn't fit in with their plans.

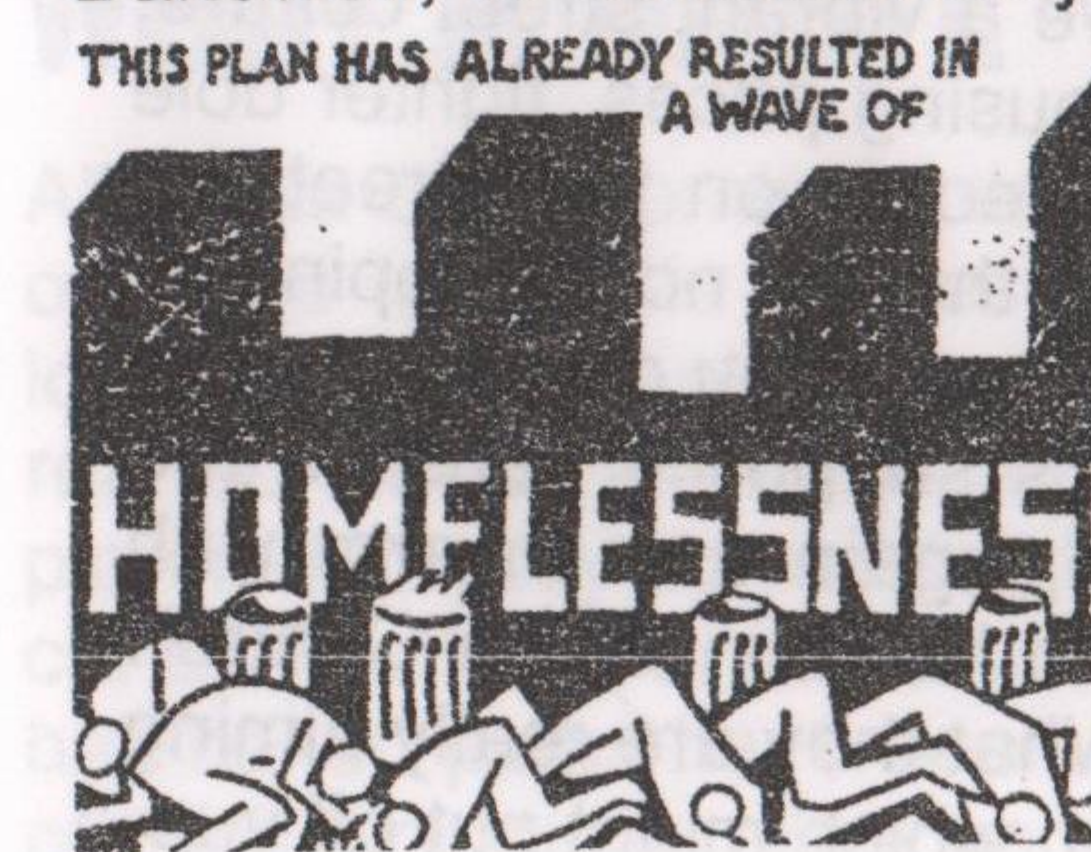
BRIGHTER BRIXTON FOR WHO?

The eviction of 121 is only a part of what the council is up to in Brixton. Look around you, these days, and what do you see? Brixton has changed.



CCTV cameras everywhere, posh bars replacing pubs, rents rising...This process has been underway for several years. A lot of this has been connected with the council getting (and squandering) the Brixton Challenge millions. They said this was to make the area a better place to live. But for who? The council only got the money by giving guarantees that they would clean up the area, cut down on crime, get rid of squatters and people

hanging about on the street. Huge sums have been spent on making Brixton an attractive place for people with loads of money to live or come for a night out, while 1000s of people have been forced out of their houses and flats, evicted so the buildings could be sold off cheap to property companies to make a huge profit, or to big housing associations which will house the people the council can't - for a price. So while it's virtually impossible to rent a cheap flat or get housed by the council, they are busy reducing the places available. Plans are underway to do the same with houses occupied by housing co-ops & shortlife groups, putting many more people out on the streets. The end result of this is the gradual forcing of poor and working class people out of Brixton, in favour of yuppies and middle class professionals: a "better sort" of people. The company handling the selling off of much of Lambeth's housing and commercial property, Nelson Bakewell, is coincidentally run by former officers of Lambeth's Property



department. Not a stitch up job, of course. Much of the changes in Brixton have the same end in mind. It's virtually impossible now to go out on Friday night and find a normal pub. They have been disappearing at a rate of knots. Instead we've got a growing number of expensive bars, with bouncers to weed out undesirables, CCTV cameras in the corners, often overcharging to get in. Places

like the Dogstar, the Fridge bar, the Bug bar, the Satay bar, the Junction...Run and owned by a small Mafia, they are closing down what's left of the old nightlife. The Coach and Horses pub on Coldharbour lane: closed down, bought by the Satay bar. Bradys(The Railway as we still remember it): closing down to be done up and sold off, probably to the Dogstar. Even the pubs that are opening are faceless chain pubs. What odds on pubs like The Angel and The Effra being next?

DOGSHIT

The Dogstar stands for all that's sick about this business: Everyone knows how much the cops and the council wanted to get rid of the Atlantic. When they finally closed it down, the Dogstar was opened with police and council backing. The layout & planning of the bar was done hand-in-hand with the



Dogstar Regulars: "Blimey, £2.50 for that pint of piss!"

police, who insisted on cameras inside to film people. It's obvious they made licensing concessions & guaranteed it's survival too - useful, since 2 weeks after its opening hostile locals showed their feelings by rioting and smashing it up. Hence the saying "I had a smashing time at the Dogstar last night". The people who own this dump are trying to take over everything else round here. We aren't saying we don't want variety but all these places LOOK THE SAME. Overpriced beer, overcrowded with trendy nobs bussing in from the West End. They won't even let us work behind the bars, our accents are wrong.

POLICE AND THIEVES IN THE STREET?

It's no coincidence that at the same time as these places are opening, the council and the police have made a concerted effort to clear people off the streets. Brixton used, winter and summer, to have a vibrant street culture, part of the community of the place. Rent rises, housing prices, tighter dole rules have been forcing people off the streets. People on the street are always a 'threat' to the police and the council, if they're not shopping or going to work. These people started the riots, they say. You can see how if someone farts in certain streets in Brixton there's six police vans on the scene in a minute. The latest council initiative, again arm in arm with Brixton cops, is the banning of 'street drinking' in "Brixton Town Centre". They say this is aimed at 'aggressive beggars'. What they are really aiming at is preventing gatherings of people on the street, which might put off yup-

pies coming to spend their money, or lead to a repeat of the December 1995 riot. If you can't afford to drink in the bars, they'll nick you. The bars, don't forget, who are all paying tidy sums to the police for protection. A nice little earner - for some.

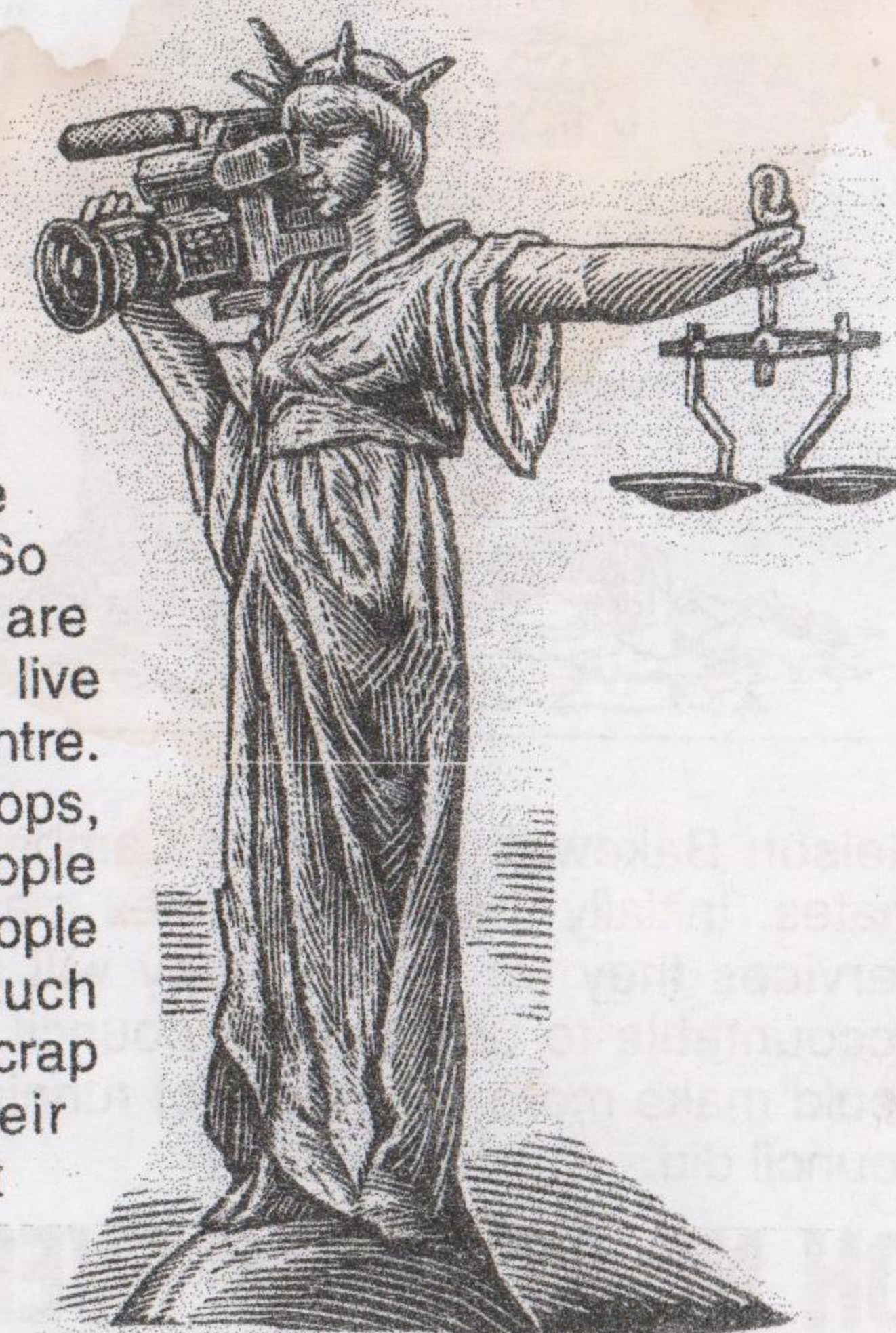
SMILE - YOU'RE ON TV

The motives behind the CCTV cameras now watching us all round the area are similar. They are supposed to stop crime. They do not. Studies have shown all such schemes do is drive streetcrime out of the area - into the surrounding streets without cameras. So muggings and assaults and break-ins are pushed even more onto the people who live in the estates and streets outside the centre. But so long as its not the bars, the shops, the businesses, the visible Brixton. People who rob, rape and attack other poor people are scum, but the police never do much about them, being too busy kicking the crap out of anyone black they can get their hands on. The CCTV is there to protect the property and wealth of the middle class running the shops etc. It doesn't prevent violent crime, as if

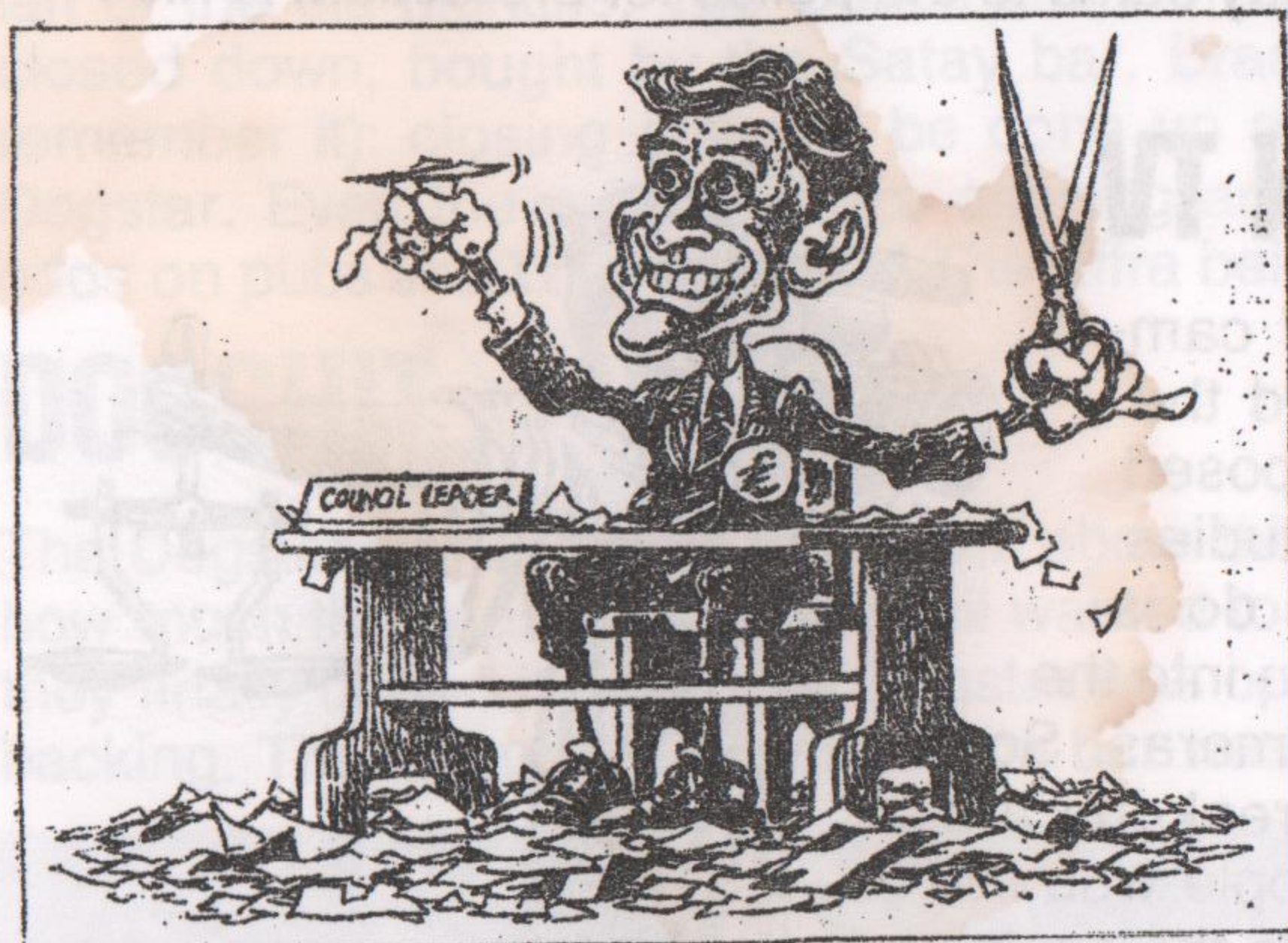
the cops gave a toss most of the time. What CCTV does do is increase the non-stop surveillance of our lives which is everywhere these days - streets, bars, work, dole offices, shopping centres....They are there to control us, to keep tabs on who's doing what, and to crack down on us if we get together to resist them, or to enjoy ourselves in ways not sanctioned by THEIR laws. Which brings us back to the eviction of 121, and the closing of all the all-night off-licences. The powers that be hate spaces they can't control and people having a good time without permission. Like having the odd spliff when we feel like it.

WHAT A WASTE

All these developments, the Brixton Challenge grand plans, the rebuilding over the tube (this will result in the loss of market stalls and long-running local shops), the plans for a fifty quid a night hotel on Coldharbour lane (a real bonus for the local community), on what has happened and what is planned, mostly do nothing for local working class people. Although in typical Lambeth style, large sums of money have vanished and many of their half-baked plans have been grounded. The over-tube development ran out of cash, coincidentally a company set up by Heather Rabbatts has now got



the contract! What is sure is that for years while this money is being wasted in gentrification the council has been closing and running down local



services "because they can't afford it". Library hours have been cut, and they want to shut 5 libraries. Schools are closing. Most of the advice centres in Lambeth have shut, as well the Unemployed (Jan Rebane) Centre. Voluntary groups and playgrounds have been shut down, more are under threat. Departments have been passed to dodgy companies like

Nelson Bakewell and Team Lambeth, run by ex-council officers & their mates. Initially these companies may be more efficient, but running local services they for a profit they will soon cut corners and are even less accountable to us than the council. Though it's hard to believe anyone could make more of a mess of running the Housing Benefit office than the council did.

OH NO NOTHING EVER CHANGE

The fact is that all the money floating round is going into the pockets of the middle classes, and in the way these things go when the slump comes or Brixton stops being so trendy, they will disappear and we will be picking up the pieces again. People like Chief Executive Heather Rabbatts get paid a hundred thousand a year to mess things up (and make a fool of herself on TV). Our lives don't change.



REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL?

Is all this just sour grapes? Are we just moaning about all this because we want to make trouble? Many people reading this know that all that is going on is doing very little for them. They might say, "Yeah but what can we do about it?" Maybe it is too late to stop all this, or change it. But alot of the developments are just on the surface. Behind it all Brixton people still have a lot of spirit and are sometimes prepared to stand together and tell the council and the cops where to go. The riots of '81, '85, during the poll tax, and the Xmas special of 1995 show what happens when they push people too far. Only a couple of years ago some council and library workers went on strike to stop cuts in services and fight council. Places cut by the council have fought brilliantly over the years, and the ongoing anti-school closures campaign shows that spirit isn't dead.

The council and all their cronies have had too easy a time of it recently. It is hard sometimes to see how we can change things but if people get together and stand up for ourselves we can force them to back down. 121 might not be everyones cup of tea, far from it, but all the spaces we use, from pubs to street corners to community centres are under attack. Despite big differences as people we have alot in common and the power to make life hard for the authorities who want to run our lives.

WE'RE NOT GIVING UP

We are up for talking to anyone who wants to kick up a fuss about what's happening to our area. We don't know when the council are planning to evict 121, but we know they want to auction it off in March. We will not give the building up without a fight.

The centre is open every day from 12 noon, so drop in and have a chat.

Or ring us on:

0171 978

8214 or 0171 274 6655.

You can Fax us on

0171 326 0353.

e-mail: mark261@hotmail.com

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