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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1973.



Tolmers somersault

A HIGH POWERED delegation, representing Labour-controlled London boroughs and the GLC, is to ask the Environment Secretary to make Tolmers Square the pilot scheme for a new deal in urban property development.

The decision came at Camden Council's meeting on Wednesday, when the Labour leadership displayed a dramatic change of opinion by withdrawing the report recommending joint development of Tolmers Square with Stock Conversion and Investment Trust.

Councillor Frank Dobson, leader of the council, revealed that last minute discussions with Camden's Labour MPs and Sir Reg Goodwin, the GLC leader, had resulted in a decision to ask the Government to "redress the balance" between developers and councils whose planning powers helped swell property values.

They will ask Mr Rippon, the Environment Secretary, to grant Camden compulsory purchase orders for Tolmers Square and to authorise

DELEGATION WILL PRESS RIPPON TO GRANT CPOs

a system of financing the commercial development which would return profits to the community.

This finance might come from a London consortium — representing the GLC and boroughs—borrowing money on the open market, or from bodies such as the Co-op or the TUC, at relatively low rates.

Mr Dobson's announcement put him firmly back in the Labour leadership saddle, a seat threatened by motions from two of Camden's three constituency Labour parties and 8,000 signatures gathered by the Stop the Levy Deal Campaign, opposing his initial determination to sign the Stock Conversion contract.

JUSTIFIED

"In withdrawing this report we may lead to some delay in the provision of adequate and decent housing on the Tolmers Square site," he told the council. "That may be the case, we take the responsibility for it, but I believe the delay will be justified.

"I am hopeful that we can, by way of concerted and intensive effort, persuade the Minister that he must redress the balance between developers and councils."

All schemes for the site, including one being prepared by Tolmers Village Association and the SLD Campaign for rehabilitation of the houses, would be considered only after the meeting. The discussion could have a radical effect in Covent Garden, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Islington, where councils were being asked to sanction lucrative commercial development schemes.

Alderman Alan Greengross, opposition planning spokesman, said he was unable to see the move as anything but "the Labour Party's endless changes of mind and soul-searching."

Punishing developers by buying their land, providing a quick return on capital without the developer having to lift a finger, would turn any developer in Camden into a masochist, he said.

"We take it from what we have heard this evening that the Claudius deal is out of the way," he said. This non-profit scheme offered "nothing except the services of a couple of journalists who knew nothing except possibly how to use the media."

If Camden made CPOs on Tol-

mers Square it would have to admit an intention to change the West End residential zoning of the site, "opening the floodgates for Stock Conversion to do what they damn well like."

But the report was withdrawn despite the opposition of the 12 Tories and abstentions by councillors John Thane and Ivor Walker, Planning Committee chairman and vice-chairman.

Later Mr Walker said in a personal statement that he had been libelled in a cartoon relating to Tolmers Square appearing in a Camden community newspaper.

NO SHARES

He intended to take legal action against the publisher and would donate any damages awarded to the Community Housing Association.

Mr Walker stressed that the Planning Committee had never dealt with Tolmers Square negotiations, he had never met Mr Levy and he held no shares or interest in the Stock Conversion.

After the council meeting, Mr Bennie Gray, one of the two promoters of the Claudius deal, said he was delighted that the Stock Conversion deal had been halted.

He had high hopes of an alternative scheme emerging and believed that the Tolmers Village Association project for rehabilitation, which will be presented to the council in three months' time, would be attractive.

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