

## The Camden record

In Mr Neil Mc-Intosh's rambling and petulant 'reply' last Sunday to our two articles on Camden Council's housing record (30 November and 7 December), there are four points of fact on which we would like the opportunity to set the record straight once and for all.

(1) Perhaps the most remarkable and revealing feature of Camden's defence has been its consistent refusal to accept that, this year, its Housing Revenue Account will be subsidised by public money to the tune of £23.9 million. For quoting this figure we have been accused of 'science fiction.' Camden says it has 'no idea' where we got the figure from. Yet we got it from figures supplied by Camden's own Finance Department to CIPFA, which showed that this year Camden's total revenue expenditure of £30.4 million will be balanced by £6.5 million rent—leaving the entire £23.9 million remaining to be made up by the ratepayers, and by the taxpayers of Britain through central Government. For Mr McIntosh and his colleagues to deny these figures—and thus to obscure the fact that Camden enjoys by far the highest rate of public housing subsidy in the country—is little short of scandalous.

(2) For Mr McIntosh and his colleagues to go on trying to make us out to be somehow 'right wing' enemies of public housing—for daring to criticise their record—is so absurd as to be laughable. The reason why we have criticised Camden's record so often is precisely that the Council is so uniquely inefficient at the admirable job of providing public housing. If there is one thing more depressing than the self-righteous way in which Camden defends its financial recklessness, it is the appalling anxiety and misery which the Council's housing programme has caused for so many thousands of ordinary people who have lost their

homes and jobs as a result.

(3) In our second article we quoted extensively from the preliminary findings of the study being carried out by Renate Prince, Dick Robin and John Roberts into the effects of comprehensive redevelopment. For Mr McIntosh to attempt to dismiss this extremely important and thoroughly-researched academic study (which has not yet even been published) with a few deliberately non-comparable and meaningless statistics is extraordinary.

(4) Mr McIntosh attempts to defend his Council's decision to pay £3 million for a piece of land at Tolmers Square on which the Council hopes to build a gigantic speculative office block (a deal that has gone down in the London property world as the one funny thing that has happened in 1975), by claiming that two years ago we were prepared to pay more than twice as much for that land as part of our 'non-profit-making offer' for the site. Neither Mr McIntosh nor Camden Council appear to be aware that conditions in the London office market have changed considerably since the height of the property boom in 1973. In fact, had Camden accepted our offer when it was first made, they would have got eight acres of housing land for nothing—and would not be lumbered with a speculation that is likely to become the biggest millstone ever placed round the necks of a group of ratepayers.

In general, Mr McIntosh still seems not to have grasped why it is that a national newspaper should take such an interest in the affairs of Camden. The answer, as we tried to explain, is that Camden leads almost every conceivable national league table for the way in which it spends and mis-spends public money on housing—and it is of some public interest to know why this should be.

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