

CASE FOR LEVY IS WRONG ON EVERY POINT

IT WAS most courageous, and most useful to our campaign, for Councillor Ivor Walker, who has always been such an enthusiastic protagonist of the Levy Deal, to set out the seven factors on which his position is based. All seven are either wrong, or irrelevant.

It's worth examining each of Councillor Walker's "facts" in turn; maybe by doing so we can correct a number of the misconceptions and misrepresentations which have led him, and others, to favour the Levy Deal.

1. Mr Walker says Stock Conversion own "over half of the Tolmers Square site." They do not. He then says "only the amount of the offices can be disputed," with the clear implication that Stock Conversion can make a considerable profit even if Camden Council refuse to help them. This is a complete misconception of planning law. In fact, without Camden's active assistance Stock Conversion would be able to build only a relatively small number of offices on part of the Tolmers Square site.

2. Mr Walker points out that compulsory purchase order on part of the housing land was refused by the last Government in 1970. True, but totally irrelevant to the current issue.

3. "The proposed development on the site is exactly the same under the Claudius proposal as the Stock Conversion proposal." The difference is that Claudius offers to give Camden all the development profits. These profits could be translated into better housing, more housing, more social amenities, or more office space. The choice is Camden's.

4. Mr Walker accuses Claudius of being greedy. Claudius offers to give Camden all the development profits. These profits could be translated into better housing, more housing, more social amenities, or more office space. The choice is Camden's.

5. According to Mr Walker, "only a raving idiot" could think an Environment Minister would grant a compulsory purchase order for Claudius. Presumably such raving idiots include Reg Freeson, Shadow Minister for Housing, Illyd Harrington, deputy leader of the GLC, Clive Jenkins, Douglas North, and a large number of his responsible councillor colleagues in Camden.

6. "If such a CPO were granted it would involve paying Stock Conversion £7 million for doing nothing." Of course. But once again Mr Walker strains at a gnat while ignoring an elephant. If he objects to Joe Levy getting £7 million, why doesn't he object to him getting £20 million?

7. Mr Walker also has a lamentable lack of faith in the justice and common good sense of a public inquiry when he

argues it couldn't go well for Claudius. The Environment Department has already said: "The Minister would have to balance justice to Stock Conversion against the financial benefits to the local community promised by Claudius... certainly relative profits to the ratepayers of the two schemes would be a factor to be taken into account." Why is he so defeatist? Does he completely dismiss the influence at a public inquiry of the many thousands of ordinary Camden residents, plus raving idiots like Reg Freeson and Illyd Harrington?

I hope Mr Walker has also taken good note of the housing figures researched by architect Richard Hobin and Renate Prince. They show that at the end of the Levy scheme Camden will have housed, at most, 500 people on the housing list. Is that worth losing £20 million to Joe Levy? It would actually be cheaper for Camden to buy each of those homeless a luxury £40,000 flat, and we would save Tolmers Square!

I am accustomed to arguing against opponents who have some arguments wrong, not against those who have them all wrong. And such trivial points, too.

The main issue is whether everyone in Camden gets the £20 million, or Joe Levy. Why does Mr Walker try to fog matters with tiny, inaccurate irrelevances? He must be nervous.

—NICHOLAS TOMALIN,
57 Gloucester Crescent,
NW1.

THE DEBATE about Tolmers Square is an important one for Camden and the decision will have important implications for property redevelopment throughout London. It therefore needs to be considered very carefully indeed.

The Claudius proposal is an ingenious attempt to return the improved value of redeveloped land to the community represented by the borough. All the assessments made thus far by council officers show that the method is practicable. If it succeeds, it can be an important breakthrough in urban development which will reduce the role of the property developer.

The main argument put forward by Ivor Walker against the adoption of the Claudius scheme is that the Government will refuse to confirm the compulsory purchase order on the land owned by Stock Conversion, and that the council may then lose the housing benefit proposed in this scheme. I think that this assumption is debatable.

The argument for confirming the CPO is that it would make a big saving for Camden ratepayers. To a Tory, saving the ratepayers' money has always been a fundamental belief. Has Ivor Walker forgotten that the ratepayers' associations were the (thinly veiled) precursors of the Conservative Party in local government?

The argument that the Claudius proposal would save the ratepayers' money could be the offer that the Tory Minister cannot refuse!

The second consideration is the likely delay and loss in council housing. I believe that this case is largely lost because we

now know that Claudius intends to fight Camden's decision to do the deal with Stock Conversion in the courts. Lengthy delay is anyway inevitable both here and when the CPOs come up for inquiry.

In all the circumstances, I believe that Camden would do better to go for the long-term view and the correct principle of the matter rather than hope to achieve a now doubtful short-term gain.

—ENID WISTRICH,
Camden Councillor for Priory Ward
and GLC Councillor for Hampstead.

MY PARTICIPATION in the Stop Levy campaign is because I believe the Tolmers Square deal is a bad deal for the people of Camden, and for the following reasons:

1. If a developer needs the co-operation and active assistance of a local authority in order to produce a company gain of £20 million, it is absolute nonsense for the local authority to give this assistance for a paltry return of £3,500,000.

2. Previous arrangements between developer and authority in this borough have resulted in similar disproportionate gains—the classic example being Centre Point.

3. At present, Camden, together with other boroughs in London, is suffering from an acute shortage of both cash and land for the purpose of increasing its housing stock.

One of the ways it can overcome this famine is to make better use of its discretionary powers relating to planning permissions, special planning permissions and compulsory purchase orders.

When dealing with this Tolmers Square project, there arose for the first time a new type of proposition whereby it became possible for Camden to pioneer a new concept in development which would result in a gain—not for the commercial developer, but for the people of the borough.

The implications of this new type of scheme go far beyond this Tolmers Square deal. For it will give the Department of the Environment the opportunity to show by its approval and support for the local authority that it is ready to get its priorities right—that is, to give the people and their housing requirements preference over the purely commercial interests of the property developer, whose only concern is maximum profits for his investment.

The time is long overdue for somebody to cry, "Enough", and Camden should now proceed to do this. The borough, together with other areas of London, has been despoiled sufficiently by the monstrosities created by the developers. And it is high time that the future of London was taken out of the hands of speculators.

The present Camden Council can rightly be described as a progressive one, and is composed in the main of councillors whose primary concern is the well-being of constituents.

The arguments put forward by the council for acceptance of the Levy deal are, in my opinion, based on a sincere and honest appraisal of the options, and fully agreed to as a result of fear that the possible loss of 485 units of housing should the Minister refuse to support the alterna-

tive scheme. This fear, though ever present, is I think exaggerated.

It is a recognised fact by now that this Government has not shown by its actions its readiness to move against the property developers and/or speculators: Centre Point with Peter Walker's empty threats comes readily to mind. The Tolmers Square issue is different, however, inasmuch as the choice to be made is a clear-cut one, which can have but one interpretation.

Should the Minister still act against the wishes and interests of the people of Camden, then this will drive yet another nail into the coffin of the party that governs this country.

Finally, for the consideration of Councillor Walker and others like-minded: Since when do people, convinced that their cause is just, run away from a fight because the odds appear stacked against them? Maplin, Covent Garden and Piccadilly should stiffen their determination.

—SAMUEL WALDMAN,
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West End Lane, NW6.

COUNCILLOR Ivor Walker states categorically that the Minister of Housing and Construction will not confirm a CPO against Stock Conversion and calls those of us who think otherwise "raving idiots."

Has it not occurred to him that there might be a change of government by the time what he himself calls a very protracted inquiry, has been concluded. Or is he suggesting that even a Labour Minister would refuse to confirm such a CPO!

—MRS SABINE LOEFFLER,
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Lissenden Gardens, NW5.

THE two stories of the Tolmers Square mix-up and the drastic rent increases in West Hampstead, highlight a terrifying human problem.

The rents decision emphasises the total failure of the Housing Finance Act. We can see that landlords can drive a coach-and-four through the clauses designed to protect the tenant. Can anyone now doubt that there is a need for a right of appeal to a court of law.

But any such appeal must be available to all tenants, private and council. It is not always an advantage for a tenant to exchange a profit-motivated landlord for a bureaucracy-based landlord. The wish of private tenants to be taken-over by the local authority is understandable and, in my opinion, to be encouraged. However, I am not sure that a mere take-over or transfer is the right answer.

The setting-up of tenants co-operatives, particularly in respect of privately-owned blocks, subject to the activities of speculators, would return the emphasis to the human nature of the problem.

The Tolmers Square situation is turning into a horrible mix-up. Camden Council are morally wrong in supporting the Levy deal but when faced with a Minister who can be expected to favour private developers, it must be admitted that they have a problem.

However, one can have no sympathy with those who seek to make purely party political capital out of the issue of housing those in need.

Indeed, this is the greatest tragedy of all, that successive housing legislation, while containing good points, has too often been based on party dogma rather than the fact that those in need are people and not statistics.

Let the humane parts of the law be used. Let us hope that Camden Council will be prepared to use the take-over powers of the 1964 Act solely for the benefit of tenants. Let us also fight to change the law to involve the tenant in the control of his environment and the management of his home.

Finally, let us condemn all those who profiteer at the expense of ordinary people who want a decent home, and also those who help or encourage such profiteers.

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