

# THE SQUARE DEAL ERA

## Tolmers triumph after years of battle



● Councillors Bill Birtles (left) and Julian Fullbrook with MP Frank Dobson: "I remember the raddled ruins."

THE "bitter and protracted" struggle by Camden to build on Tolmers Square, off Euston Road, was recalled on Saturday with the opening of a £3,500,000 development by Mr Frank Dobson, MP for Holborn and St Pancras South.

The new estate — which combines offices with housing for 222 people — virtually completes the council's improvement plans for the area.

The history of the site has been one of controversy and slow progress, beginning with the first development application in 1959. At the height of the property boom in 1973 the council came close to finalising a deal to buy the site but drew back after public protest.

The council also dropped a £12 million deal — and in 1975 it bought the land for £4 million.

Mr Dobson, speaking at the estate's new community centre, recalled 1973, when he was leader of the council in 1973 and the purchase of Tolmers Square became the burning issue of the day.

And he compared the subsequent "rowing and arguments" to the constant reshewing of the film *Gunfight at the OK Corral* at the "right old flea-pit" that was the old Tolmers Square cinema.

In the last few years before it closed it seemed to be showing *Gunfight* every other week — and looking back he thought that was an amen.

"The fights over Tolmers Square were the most bitter and protracted of all the struggles we had in trying to get decent housing for local people in spite of the private ownership of the land," he said.

He recalled the first approach from property owners Stock Conversion and Investment Trust Ltd, the owners of much of Tolmers Square and who were responsible for the Euston Tower.

"Mr Robert Clarke got in touch to say that he'd been so moved by a television talk on housing by Lord Goodman that they thought they'd sell to us so we could get on with rehousing. I nearly laughed my head off . . . there was a Labour

Government and the bottom had dropped out of the property market."

The council bought the land "and immediately got on with building and rehabilitating housing to produce good homes for ordinary people at rents they can afford".

Housing had already been provided in Coburg Street, Drummond Street, Euston Street, North Gower Street and Starcross Street, he said. Housing in Hampstead Road would be ready shortly.

"This means that high-quality homes for nearly 900 people have been created. For the first time ever the land round here is owned by the people and is being used to benefit the people. For the first time ever nearly everyone round here will live in good conditions."

Under private landlords the land and buildings in the area were devoted to private profits, he said. "I remember the raddled ruins

into which the houses were allowed to decay. It took public ownership, public funds and public commitment to transform this area into a place where local people can live a decent life."

Councillor Bill Birtles, Camden's Housing Development chairman, said that Tolmers Square was the culmination of an ambitious housing programme slashed by the Conservative Government when it cut Camden's housing investment allowance.

"This development makes it quite clear what Camden wants its tenants to have — you have only to walk round other Labour boroughs like Southwark or Conservative boroughs where there is no new council housing to see the difference."

The Department of the Environment was demanding lower standards in housing by clamping down on details

such as damp courses, central heating and lifts in council estates. But Camden was not prepared to lower its standards to cater for the "political wishes" of the Government.

Councillor Julian Fullbrook, the Housing Management Committee chairman, offered a vote of thanks on behalf "of all the people who get a chance to use this development".

Outlining the extent of the housing crisis in Camden, he said: "We have a terrible job fitting thousands of families into very few units, but we want to get on with that job and hope the Department of the Environment will listen to our pleas on your behalf."

The Mayor of Camden, Councillor Tom Devine, praised the efforts of Camden's officers, many of whom had worked at the Tolmers Square project in their own time.

# No Militant expulsions, party decides

HAMPSTEAD Labour Party will refuse to expel any Militant supporters.

The party's general council vote 18-15 last Friday to make its stand. It will now inform the national executive committee of its decision.

Mr Bob Labi, a leading Militant supporter, and thought to be high on the NEC's hit list, said the main

but the threat of expulsions.

"The conference voted for the register but at the same time the conference did not vote for any expulsions. If there had been the question of expulsions then a number of trade unions which had voted for the register would not have voted for it," he said.

If expulsions did go ahead, not only Militant

"Expulsions will break the unity of this party. They will wreck this party."

He was supported by Mr Sean Baine, who said the registrar was another aspect of the general move of the Labour Party towards the right.

"The right are just as organised as the left in terms of doing things in secret or in smoke-filled rooms," he added.

and the party had to accept the register.

No-one wanted to expel "the friendly neighbourhood Militant", he said — the register was aimed at people forming their own policies and programmes in a "secret and underhand way".

● Mr Labi and Camden councillor Sandy

day opposing the expulsion threat.

The meeting decided to form a group which would work closely with, but not form part of, the London Standing Committee Against the Witch Hunt, formed by Militant supporters in September.

Delegates stressed that they were fighting all possible expulsions. Bill Barker