

THE DAILY HAZARD

GLC abolition: hazards in capital crisis

Barring some sort of miracle, this is the last issue of the *Daily Hazard* that will carry the familiar statement: "The London Hazards Centre is GLC-funded". What happens on 1st April?

At the time of going to press, the Centre's future existence hangs largely on the outcome of our application to the inter-borough "Richmond Scheme". If it is successful and met in full, the London Hazards Centre will continue as a resource centre on hazards to people in London. If unsuccessful, it could mean the end of the Centre or a drastic change in the services offered.

It is impossible for us to plan anything with certainty beyond April. And the time taken away from our normal work to deal with this funding crisis will never be recovered.

Even if our application to the Richmond Scheme meets with

some success, we will find ourselves in a similarly insecure position this time next year. This means that the organisations that use our resources – particularly the trade unions – will have to help us overcome this yearly crisis by making commitments to fund the Centre when grants dry up.

The GLC and hazards

The GLC has supported many projects on hazards, from stress in bus workers to the hazards of the food we eat. Through enlightened policies on employment practice it has spread the idea that discrimination and poor working and living conditions have a detrimental effect on health and quality of life.

The Government has made no provision for this innovative work to continue. The Labour-controlled Association of London Authorities may try to keep some of these initiatives alive,

but they seem unlikely to put up more than £7 or £8 million of the present £50 million Industry and Employment budget.

The work of the Hazards Centre has been made considerably easier by the existence of the GLC's Scientific Services Branch. This branch regulates hazardous waste disposal, monitors pollution and provides equipment, advice and training to the boroughs.

Disposal of hazardous waste will be lost to the London Waste Disposal Regulatory Authority, a quango. The fate of most of the Scientific Services is still not settled. The Residuary Body, the GLC winding-up organisation, will support it for no more than a year, during which time it must raise money from the boroughs. Even this precarious situation is an improvement on the Government's original plan which left out Scientific Services completely. It was only after an outcry by the scientific community that the House of Lords amended the Bill to preserve this "centre of excellence".

Much information on hazards has also been made available through the GLC's Intelligence Unit, Research Library and award-winning computer databases. However, GLC abolition means that the Unit will have to lose staff, take on more work and transfer its huge library and computer facilities to non-existent new premises all in the space of a year. How it is supposed to carry on functioning is a mystery.

Asbestos is a major problem in London's schools. Hopefully, the GLC/ILEA Joint Working Party on Asbestos will be kept going by ILEA.

It is appalling to see the uncertainty which still exists so late in the day. One thing is clear: when the Tories put abolition in their 1983 manifesto they had no idea how much the GLC does to protect people from hazards in London and the implications of losing these services for the lives of Londoners.

NUPE action on pesticides takes root in Islington

Union resistance to the BP weedkiller Rassapron has spread from Waltham Forest to Islington.

After the NUPE general branch in Waltham Forest forced the council to withdraw the "three-in-one" herbicide in June (*Daily Hazard* No.4), they sent their documents, including a report by the London Hazards Centre, to their colleagues in Islington. Initial negotiations in Islington produced a prompt withdrawal of another BP "cocktail" product, Torapon, which contains the chemical 2,4-D. As we reported in July, NUPE has advised its members nationally not to handle any of the 34 trade-named pesticides containing this suspected cancer agent.

Rassapron remained in service until Islington NUPE could get further details from the Hazards Centre on the toxicity of its three ingredients: aminotriazole, atrazine and diuron. Satisfied that these constituted a three-in-one health hazard – carcinogen, allergen and irritant – the parks' stewards asked Islington to withdraw Rassapron. The council agreed.

More significant in the long term, the council has agreed to discuss the union's proposals for a comprehensive policy for the safe selection and use of pesticides. If all goes well, it should be a model for less enlightened boroughs.

For further information, write to Seb Fischer, NUPE Office, 23 Compton Terrace, London N1.

● For details of the *Pesticides Action Bulletin*, see page 4.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



● Many South African children live in the shadow of asbestos. Inside, we describe the black miners' fight to close mines p2

● Hazards Centre survey reveals noise hazard in shops p3

● Vehicle exhausts leave office workers fuming p4

The London Hazards Centre is GLC-funded

Asbestos miners fight killer dust

In January, a Hazards Centre worker was honoured to pay a return visit to the Black Allied Mining and Construction Workers' Union (BAMCWU) of South Africa while on holiday in Africa. A packed meeting of miners was addressed at a chrome mine, deep in the mineral-rich Drakensberg mountains of north-east Transvaal.

Many of the miners came from, or had worked at, the infamous Penge asbestos mine. The miners are united in their fight to end the mining and use of asbestos.

Community action

The national asbestos campaign set up by the BAMCWU is based on the principle of total community involvement – asbestos diseases are affecting all the people living in the vicinity of the mine. Slag heaps and drifts of asbestos line the roads around Penge. The material has been used extensively to build homes and schools.

The effect of that campaign was obvious in the local township where the women were wearing "Asbestos Kills" T-shirts.

The BAMCWU is addressing the problem of what alternative employment might be found when mines are closed. Brick-making is being considered, if capital can be found.

Legal force

The union is currently preparing to take legal action against the South African Government for failing to enforce the control limits for asbestos fibre release in the mines. At times the level has been 260 times the UK control limit and 65 times the South African control limit. Civil ac-

tions for negligence are also being taken by workers against the company.

Organising on health and safety

The BAMCWU is dynamic in both growth of members and in its organisational structure. A conference is planned for April on health and safety in the mines. The conference will lead to election of health and safety representatives and safety committees. South African legislation has no provision for such trade union representation in workplace health and safety issues.

Consultation in Wandsworth...

Deadly asbestos in your home? Millions of Pharaoh's ants? These hazards should cause you no problem if you live in Wandsworth – the council will see to them in no time. Sounds great, until you realise that all these good works would be done when it suited the council and whether or not it suited you.

Late last year, Wandsworth Council could not understand why the tenants of Sudbury House so angrily declined their offer of improvement work. The reason was that although tenants desperately wanted the works done, they were not consulted about when and how the work would be undertaken.

This meant that many people were being asked to leave their homes while the works went ahead but were not given enough time to make arrangements to cope with the disruption. Many others were worried that the asbestos removal might be a botch job and result in a

greater hazard greeting them on their return.

Tenant pressure led to the Hazards Centre being called in and the council agreeing to a series of consultative meetings with tenants' representatives. Tenants were given access to documents relating to the improvements and delayed the start of the work until they had satisfied themselves that the job specification would result in the safe removal of asbestos. Similar talks were held on the pesticide treatments.

The tenants of Sudbury House have apparently taught the council a valuable lesson: when residents in Southfields voiced concerns about the hazard from the demolition of an old factory containing asbestos, a Wandsworth councillor helped set up a consultative committee and invited the Hazards Centre. This sudden concern bore no relation to the fact that his house backed onto the factory site!



Sudbury House tenants watch asbestos hazards on video

'I Spy Asbestos'

This month, the Londoners Against Asbestos Campaign (LAAC) is launching an "I Spy Asbestos" campaign. The aim is to get as many people as possible to report suspected asbestos to local authorities and management, and to demand further action. The information will be collected and used to build towards a summertime lobby of parliament.

The campaign is also starting a **Victims Support Group** and would like to hear from any potential or actual sufferers, and relatives of victims of asbestos-related diseases.

● Take action – get your I Spy Pack with ready-to-use forms and letters from *Maire Pytharas, LAAC, c/o London Hazards Centre, 103 Borough Road, London SE1. Tel: 01-928 2669.*

... nonconsultation in Haringey

Haringey Council recently took all the prizes in the consultation stakes when management in the Environmental Health Department responded to health and safety problems raised by union representatives.

Far from the department being a paragon of safe systems of work, NUPE safety reps thought the place distinctly unsafe. And the London Hazards Centre was inclined to agree when it did an inspection.

Six people were crowded into rooms large enough for two, fire exits were locked, damaged asbestos wall panels were evident, wires trailed across the floor...

Other workers spend much of their working day outside the office (the lucky few, you might think). Technical officers are required to enter buildings undergoing renovation or where pest

control operatives are working, clad in full overalls and breathing gear. For their protection, technical officers are also provided with safety equipment – a raincoat, to be exact. Even with the collar turned up, it's difficult to imagine a raincoat protecting someone from a lungful of chemicals or a nail in the foot.

NUPE put these thoughts to management, along with complaints about office conditions. The response was not entirely consistent with the spirit of the Health and Safety at Work Act: there was no protective clothing available, so workers couldn't have any. When workers asked for information on workplace surveys they were fobbed off – a breach of Safety Reps' Regs.

Perhaps concerted union pressure will lead to management recommending umbrellas as well...

Some London shops are noisier than factories and could damage the hearing of the people who work in them. This is the alarming conclusion of a London Hazards Centre survey of shops in Oxford Street.

Most of the danger comes from the music that is blasted out to attract customers in from the street and provide a "disco atmosphere" once they are inside. Additional noise is produced by video machines playing music or promotional tapes, by in-store "radio stations" (complete with resident DJ) and staff announcements which have to be heavily amplified to compete with the continuous background noise.

The worst offenders are clothes and record shops, but the increasing use of videos to promote products is taking noise – and stress – into previously quiet areas of department stores.

The highest level we found was at Tuccini, a clothes shop in Oxford Street. Our B&K sound level meter registered 98 decibels on the 'A' scale (98 dBA) at a distance of two metres from one of the loudspeakers. The average around the store was 94 dBA.

"The music always gives me a headache but I supposed I was just sensitive to it. The boss likes it loud so people in the street can hear it." Worker in Oxford Street clothes shop.

Although there are still no specific regulations to control noise at work, employers and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are agreed that the maximum exposure for the length of an eight-hour day should be set at 90 dBA. This is not a safe level.

One in ten workers exposed to this much noise for a working life will lose a third of their hearing for speech. And about one in 50 will lose a half. That is why the TUC has for many years campaigned for an eight-hour limit of 80 dBA – the level at which hearing damage begins.

The difference between the employers' and the TUC's idea of safety looks small until you realise that the decibel scale is logarithmic. On this scale, ten more decibels means ten times as much sound energy. In other words, 90 decibels is ten times as dangerous as 80; your hearing will be damaged ten times as quickly.

An increase of three on the decibel scale represents a double-

Workers pay for shop noise



Detroit, Oxford Street: 90 decibels to pull the customers, 85 inside

ing of the sound energy. So 93 dBA is not 'just over 90' as many employers would have you believe. It is twice as dangerous. If 90 is the limit for

eight hours, you should stop work after four hours at 93, two hours at 96, and one hour at 99.

And real protection of hearing, the TUC's 80 dBA limit,

would cut all these "safe" exposure times by one tenth.

The worst store we found, with an average level of 94 dBA in the areas where people worked, was therefore more than twice as dangerous as the official limit and more than 20 times the TUC's limit.

Even without specific regulations, shops that expose workers to a noise hazard which can be easily controlled – and music is – are in breach of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

Workers should ask for the music to be turned down to a level that not only protects hearing but also minimises the stress and fatigue caused by excessive noise. A level of 60 dBA should be plenty. Above that, you may have difficulty hearing customers or using the phone.

If management refuses, you have the right to complain to the environmental health department of your local council. An environmental health officer (EHO) should visit. EHOs are unlikely to prosecute in this situation but should order the boss to turn the music down.

Trade union safety reps or shop stewards stand a better chance than individual workers of using this right without being victimised. Joining a union may be the only way to get a quiet life!

● The pilot survey of noise in shops was part of the Hazards Centre's research into the dangers of shopwork. Our booklet on the subject should be ready in April.

Noise levels found in Oxford Street shops		
Shop	Measurement	dBA
Tuccini	Peak level, 2 metres from speaker	98
	average level around store	94
Top Shop	Peak level recorded	88
	average level around store	84
C&A Clock House	Peak level (announcements)	80
Detroit	Peak level in entrance area	90
	average level around store	85
Gee 2	Peak level, in foyer	95
HMV Records	Peak level, 3 metres from speakers	94
	average level around shop	85

El Centro de Peligros

The London Hazards Centre recently carried out a survey on the availability of health and safety information in languages other than English. It found that virtually none is produced. So a start on rectifying this abysmal shortage is being made by the *Black and Ethnic Minorities Working Group* of the Hazards Centre.

The first meeting/social of this working group was held on 31st January, and decided to produce a multi-lingual Hazards Pack. Jaqueline Moran of the Latin American Women's Rights Service agreed to work with the Hazards Centre to produce a section in Spanish on the hazards faced by Latin Ameri-

can hotel and catering workers.

The group also had an interesting discussion about the reasons why black Londoners tend to be in more hazardous jobs and housing and yet have more difficulty in airing their grievances. In the workplaces, many of the problems stem from racist employment practices and some arise from the inactivity of unions in confronting racism in both the workplace and within their own structures.

The second meeting in February attracted a larger number of groups interested in contributing to the Hazards Pack and to general discussion. The next meeting will be in late March.



For more information about the London Hazards Centre – particularly if you want to know how you can help overcome our funding crisis – contact us:

**London Hazards Centre
at the Polytechnic of the
South Bank
103 Borough Road, London SE1
Tel: 01-261 9558**

Injury reporting: new regs in April

New regulations requiring the reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences at work are due to come into force on 1st April 1986.

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 (RIDDOR) place a duty on employers to report, within seven days, any workplace injury suffered by workers and trainees that causes them to be off for more than three days. Fatalities and specified major injuries and dangerous occurrences still have to be notified immediately.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) believes that the information gleaned from these statistics will enable them "... to work effectively and efficiently towards the reduction and prevention of accidents and ill-health at work."

In theory, the reporting of diseases represents quite an improvement in the collection of data on the 28 categories of industrial disease contained in the Regulations. In the past, not all diseases for which compensation could be paid by the DHSS ("prescribed diseases") had to

be notified to the authorities as soon as a diagnosis had been made. The new regulations mean that within seven days of receiving a written diagnosis from a doctor (such as a medical certificate or statutory sick pay form), your employer has to inform the authorities if you work in a job that is listed as causing that disease.

Diagnosing occupational diseases is not the medical profession's strong point. In 1980, only 10 of the 25 medical schools in the UK had any sort of training in occupational health. The British Medical Association, which says it wasn't properly consulted over RIDDOR, is concerned that the system could lead to misdiagnosis and inaccurate recording of information, and possibly to legal problems in compensation cases.

In any case, doctors can only reveal information to your employer if they have your consent.

● Free leaflets explaining RIDDOR are available from your local Health and Safety Executive office or the HSE Enquiry Point (tel: 01-221 0416).

NEWSLETTER OF THE LONDON PESTICIDES ACTION GROUP

pesticides ACTION bulletin

Lambeth Leads on Pesticides Policy

Most local authorities have not worked out a policy for the safe and responsible use of pesticides. The London Borough of Lambeth recently adopted a general policy for all departments handling chemicals and a more detailed code for pest control. Their policies are set out on this page. On page two we give the background.

All chemicals that each Directorate of the Council makes a survey of all potentially dangerous or toxic substances which or its

- This Council is committed to protecting its staff, the public and the environment against the harmful effects that misuse of pesticides can cause.

- This Council recognises the right of tenants and the public to adequate warnings about any precautions that need to be taken in relation to pesticide use.

- This Council is committed to promoting awareness of such hazards amongst its staff and providing them with full details about the proper use of pesticides.

If you're at all interested in the hazards of pesticide use in London's homes, hospitals, schools, parks, gardens, railway lines and other open spaces, then you should subscribe to the *Pesticides Action Bulletin*.

Issue No.1 was published in January, and the London Pesticides Action Group intends to produce four issues a year. Subscription costs a minimum of £3 a year to non-profit making/labour movement organisations

for one copy of each issue and a minimum of £1 a year to individuals. All donations on top of these subscription rates are welcome as the London Pesticides Action Group has no other sources of funding.

Please make cheques/postal orders payable to "London Pesticides Action Group" and send them to *Frank Slight, Convenor, LPAG, 28 Summersby Road, Highgate, London N6*.

HAPHAZARD

Exhausted!

"Sick building syndrome" – a viaduct with fallen arches or a facade in need of a facelift perhaps? Actually, sick building syndrome is the all-too-common consequence of designing workplaces with little or no regard for the workers that will occupy them.

Camden Housing Aid Centre provides a prime example. For many months, NALGO reps at the Centre have complained that workers there suffer from malaise, headaches, and recurring colds and throat infections. A Hazards Centre survey revealed that workplace conditions could easily explain these complaints. The office was gloomy and stuffy, but inadequate lighting and inefficient heating paled into insignificance when the spotlight was turned on the ventilation system.

The Housing Aid Centre is nestled in amongst three major railway stations and at the side of a heavily used road, so the area is already polluted with lead and toxic gases.

Not content with workers enduring this paltry level of pollu-



Inlet next to outlet: workers get old air plus car fumes

tion, the powers-that-be approved plans for a ventilation system which drew petrol fumes directly from the car park at the rear and then circulated them around the office. To conserve heat the polluted air was recirculated a few times until thoroughly stale and finally fed back into the car park. Good for the fuel bill but not too healthy for the workforce.

Analysis by the Environmental Health Department found that no one pollutant occurred at an excessive concentration, so there was "little health hazard from air pollution." Unfortunately for the workers, they breathed and re-breathed all the pollutants and their symptoms throw real doubts on the EHD's assurances: their workplace and their management definitely make them sick.

Royal protection racket

Imagine an office where workers suffer excessive temperatures in summer because of inadequate circulation of air. The union brings in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector who sympathises with their complaint and recommends suitable improvements – in this case the provision of a few fans.

Management are duly informed of the improvements necessary to comply with the law, and then proceed totally to ignore both their legal duty and the union's very modest requests. Were they prosecuted or censured for their contemptuous behaviour? No – and there is little anyone can do about it.

The office – Streatham DHSS – is classified as Crown Property and, along with prisons, hospitals, Royal Parks and government offices, is exempted from the usual legal enforcement procedure. This "Crown Immunity" has been heavily criticised by both the TUC and the enforcement authorities because protecting management from prosecution inevitably

means workers go unprotected from workplace hazards.

Far from responding to this pressure by improving health and safety enforcement, the government is seeking to reduce the protection afforded to workers in all sectors. As part of this process, an Enterprise and De-regulation Unit has been set up by the Department of the Environment to "... identify difficulties caused to employers by the law on health and safety..." The truth is that protecting workers reduces profits, and profits must be protected at all costs.

● Pressure from many organisations, notably the General, Municipal and Boilermakers' Union and the Institution of Environmental Health Officers, has led to one minor victory. The government has promised to table a Bill in the coming weeks lifting Crown Immunity from hospital kitchens. Other aspects of health and safety legislation will remain unenforceable.