

March 1987



House of Commons,  
London, SW1A 0AA  
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REPORT

1. New arrival!

On January 10th I had a baby girl. She weighed in at 8lb 2oz and we've called her Amy Siobhan. Thanks to all the party members who sent their best wishes. We are really delighted with her.

Despite being on maternity leave I've been trying to keep as high a profile as possible in the local press and have been working from home. I will be back at the House of Commons after Easter.

2. Royal School for the Blind: Waterloo Road Workshop

The workshop employs 44 disabled workers. The Royal School for the Blind is threatening it with closure.

I have been working closely with the National League for the Blind and Disabled to oppose the closure including:

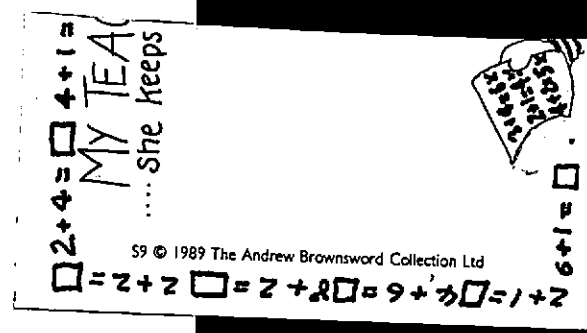
- \* making representations to the DHSS Minister and Department of Employment Minister.
- \* enlisting the help of the Charity Commission and Labour's front bench spokesperson for the disabled.
- \* attending a demonstration outside the workshop.

3. Peckham Task Force

One year ago the Government set up the Peckham Task Force in a blaze of publicity. The idea was to provide public money to create jobs by "cutting through red tape" and by-passing the Council. Twelve months later following my Parliamentary Question, the Government admitted that the Task Force has not created one single job! Together with the Council I denounced the Task Force as a cynical public relations exercise to try and show the Government cares about unemployment.

4. Liddle War By-Election: 9th April

This by-election is very important indeed for us and I hope all party members will put in as much work as possible to ensure a large vote for Labour. This is the 3rd election in Liddle Ward in the past 18 months - so we will need to work hard to get the voters to the polls. In the last by-election in Liddle, when Cllr. Mary Ellery was elected, we





got 82% of the vote - so we have a very high target to beat!

I have agreed a thorough programme of visits to the Ward between now and the election.

#### 5. New jobs in nurseries

Labour has promised one million jobs in two years. To contribute to this, I put in a "bid" for 18,000 new jobs in care for the under 5's including:

- \* more nursing places;
- \* more support for childminders.

This has been accepted by the Shadow Cabinet and the NEC and is in the new brochure "New Jobs for Britain".

#### 6. Cervical Cancer

For some time now, I have been pressing the local health authorities to do routine screening of all women for cervical cancer. This is still not happening and in 1985, 18 women in the Camberwell and Lewisham and North Southwark area died of cervical cancer. This is especially tragic as the disease is completely curable if detected early enough.

#### 7. Maternity Grant

In the past, women have been automatically entitled to a maternity grant. The Government will be abolishing this from the beginning of April and instead introducing a means-tested benefit which will only be available to many fewer women. Last year 2,689 women claimed maternity grant in Peckham so this cut is likely to hit this area particularly hard.

#### 8. Schools

- I have been liaising with the School Governors and ILEA about asbestos in the kitchen in Camelot School. I am very concerned indeed about the potential health risk to children. It has also been worrying that ILEA do not seem to have been sufficiently open and frank about the problem. It is quite wrong for ILEA to keep information secret to prevent parents from "worrying unduly" - it is for parents to decide whether there is anything to worry about when they have the full information.



- I have been liaising with Division 8 of ILEA and the local parents consultative committee about the shortage of teachers in our primary schools. All too often children have to be sent home because there is no teacher. This is disruptive for both parents and children.
- A number of parents from Lyndhurst School came to a surgery worried about admission procedures to infant school. Sometimes children get told that they haven't got a place in the infant school, too late to allow them to get a place anywhere else nearby. ILEA are currently renewing admission procedures and are looking into the prospect of an extra reception class in the area.

#### 9. Press

All party members in Peckham will have been dismayed at the constant bad publicity we have been receiving recently. It is vitally important in the run up to a general election that everything is done to show the party in a good light - as the party which is fit to form the next government.

I would like to take this opportunity of quoting from my last annual report to the party dated January 1986:

"The operation of a constituency party locally should be an example to the people in the area of socialism in practice - it is no good preaching the principles of equality, humanitarianism, openness, democracy and socialism, unless we all practice them locally. Whether it is in the Council chamber, in the ward meetings, in the GMC or (in my case) in parliament, we must all be judged by what we do and our actions. If we don't live up to those principles in how we act in the party - we cannot expect the trust and the votes of the people in Peckham."

I do not think it is right to "leak" to the press and personally I have never done so. But we would not have to worry about leaks if we had nothing to hide.

HARRIET HARMAN MP

March 1987

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REPORT

November 1987

1. Peckham Labour Party

The Peckham CLP remains suspended pending investigations by the Regional and National Labour Party. I am pressing them to conclude their deliberations as soon as possible so that the Party can begin work again. But in the meantime it is all the more important that there is constructive political activity at Ward level. Please let me know of any activities that you want me to take part in.

2. Shadow Health Minister

Before the election I was Shadow Social Services Minister. In July 1987 I was appointed Shadow Health Minister. Health is obviously a very important policy area for Labour. I fear that the Tories are happy to see waiting lists grow and NHS facilities deteriorate because they hope to drive people into the commercial medicine sector. The commercial medicine insurance companies are making a major drive to expansion by offering limited policies at reduced rates. The Tories are justifying health cuts by talking about the "escalating insatiable demands of the NHS". In fact we spend less on health care than any other European country - and about half that spent by America.

The increase in spending in the NHS does not meet the increase in demand due to the growing number of elderly people. And as the Government has not given District Health Authorities enough money to fund the pay awards, Districts are cutting services to be able to pay agreed pay increases.

At the same time as I am criticising the deterioration in the Health Service, it is important to point to ways the service should be improved. And in that respect I am preparing a report on maternity services and am looking into services for the dying.

3. Housing

My surgeries and postbag continue to bulge with increasingly serious housing problems. And Government plans to further reduce funds for renovating and building homes, together with their plans to take the best estates out of the control of councils, will make matters worse. That is why it is more important than ever for the council to do whatever is possible to improve its services. In particular, the constant high level of empty properties is totally unacceptable - particularly when there are so many people waiting for a transfer or for a first home. I am urging the council to deal with this as a matter of priority. Far from it costing money, it would save the cost of evicting squatters and would increase the council's rent revenue.

4. Surgeries

My surgeries remain packed. At a recent Peckham Town Hall surgery 100 people were waiting to see me. I would be glad to hear from any party member who would be prepared to help at my surgeries for one session a month.

5. Visits to the House of Commons

I am arranging a series of visits to the House of Commons for Peckham Labour Party members. The first visit was fully booked up and took place on 10th November. I will let your Ward Secretary know when the next visit will take place.

6. Peckham High Street

10 Peckham shopkeepers and their families stood to lose their homes and their businesses if the London Residuary Body, which took over after the GLC, sold their properties over their heads. I asked the LRB to withdraw the Peckham High Street properties from the planned auction and to negotiate to sell them to the shopkeepers themselves.

I persuaded the LRB to agree to negotiate prior to the auction and put pressure on them, as a public body, to agree to sell to the existing tenants as reasonably as possible.

As a result 8 people have been able to buy their properties.

HARRIET HARMAN MP