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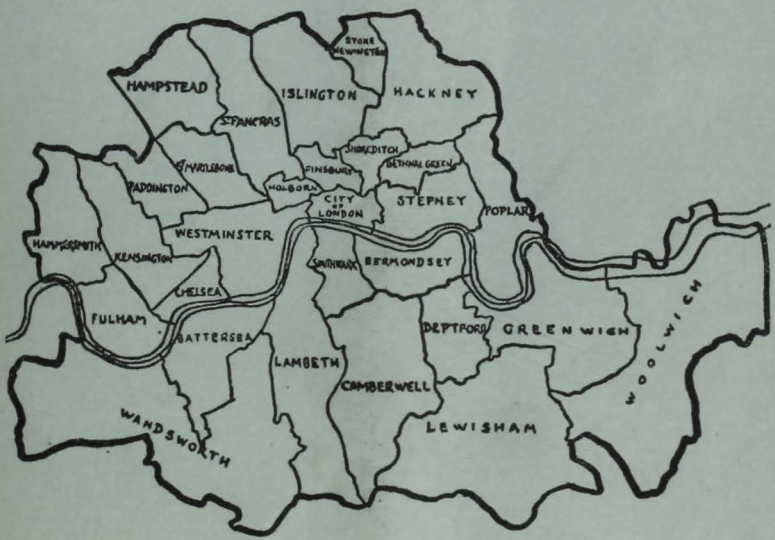
THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL 1889—1937

A Historical Sketch

BY

A. EMIL DAVIES



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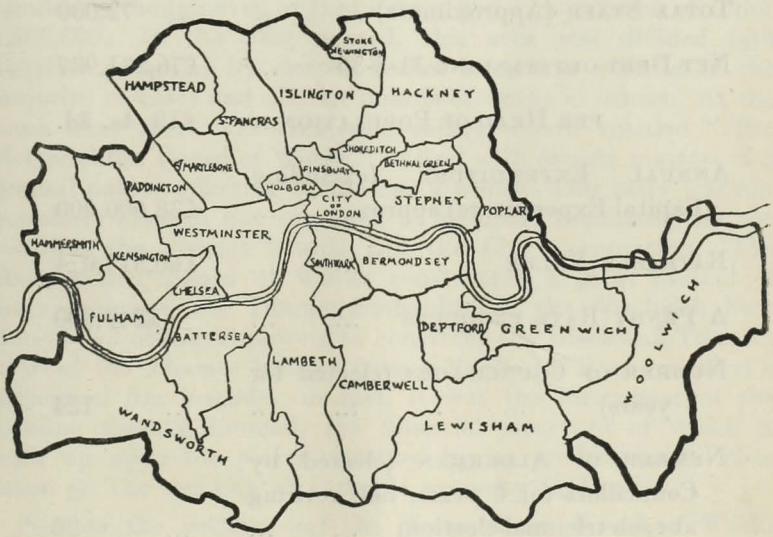

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LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL

AREA		117 square miles
POPULATION, 1935 (Estimated) ...		4,185,200
ELECTORATE ON REGISTER FOR 1937 ELECTION :—	Women	1,100,714
	Men	951,977
		2,052,691
TOTAL STAFF (Approximate)		72,000
NET DEBT OUTSTANDING 31-3-36 ...		£76,231,987
,, PER HEAD OF POPULATION...		£18 4s. 3d.
ANNUAL EXPENDITURE (excluding Capital Expenditure) approx. ...		£38,000,000
RATEABLE VALUE		£60,517,074
A PENNY RATE PRODUCES		£249,300
NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS (elected for 3 years)		124
NUMBER OF ALDERMEN (elected by Councillors for 6 years, half retiring at each triennial election)		20

THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL 1889–1937.

A Historical Sketch.

Chapter I

THE PROBLEM OF LONDON GOVERNMENT

THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL came into existence as a provisional Council on 31st January, 1889, and began its rule on 21st March, 1889. For several centuries the sole municipal government of London was the Corporation of the City of London, but its jurisdiction extended over an area of only about 1 square mile, known as " The City," and its boundaries have never been enlarged. Not until 1855 was there any central government for the area now comprised within the County of London, although even at that date it had a population of about 2,500,000. In the year named, this area was divided into districts governed by elected bodies known as vestries in the majority of cases and district boards of works in others. At the same time there was created a central board entitled " The Metropolitan Board of Works," to deal with certain matters of a general nature affecting London as a whole. This body was not popularly elected, but consisted of members nominated by the vestries, the district boards and the City Corporation. The Metropolitan Board of Works constructed a great system of main drainage, the Thames Embankment, the Woolwich Free Ferry, and obtained powers to construct the Blackwall Tunnel ; it freed ten Thames bridges from tolls (in 1877) and started a municipal fire brigade ; in fact, it was the forerunner of the London County Council, the financial structure of which is built up upon the power obtained by its predecessor to raise loans on the security of rateable property in London.

Neither the vestries nor the Metropolitan Board of Works became celebrated for their purity of motive and incorruptibility, and after an inquiry by a Royal Commission, the Government of the day, when passing the County Councils Act of 1888, formed the M.B.W. area into an " Administrative County of London," to be governed by a body directly elected by the ratepayers, the City of London, however, retaining its separate existence, with most of its ancient privileges unaltered. The boundaries

of the new county were, and still are, practically as in 1855. All around it large suburbs were in course of growth, and to-day there is as great a London outside the County as within it. The London County Council has never been popular with the governing class of this country, and instead of taking the obvious course of increasing the boundaries to follow the population, one government after another has granted charters to the congeries of streets that really belong to the metropolis ; these have become separate municipal entities, united merely in that they represent a collective vested interest opposed to any expansion of the central body. Meanwhile, the population of the County is following the same tendency as that of the City, for the number of its inhabitants is decreasing although its day population is increasing enormously. In 1901 the population of the county of London was 4,536,267 ; in 1935 it was estimated at 4,185,200, whilst " Outer London's " population was 4,289,700.

All parties on the Council were agreed that a reform of London Government was imperative, but it was not until December, 1920, when an indignant resolution was unanimously passed, that the Prime Minister (Mr. Lloyd George) received a deputation from the Council and appointed a Royal Commission to report on the Government of London. Unfortunately, this Commission was weak both in numbers and personnel, and its seven members produced three separate reports. Little has been done to bring order out of the chaos of the 110 local authorities in Greater London. The fall that is taking place in the resident population of the County is likely to be continuous, but as the day population continues to increase, it is impossible to reduce the cost of public services. London ratepayers provide and maintain bridges, streets, parks and other amenities for double their own number, and a difficult problem may confront the next generation. The average rate per £ of the London boroughs is much about the same as that in the boroughs outside the County, but as the rateable value within the County is so much higher than outside, the average amount of rates payable in London is £7.18.0 per annum per head, against £4.13.6 per head paid by the average extra-London resident.

Circumstances compel the L.C.C. itself to transfer many of its citizens into outer London, for, to cope with the housing problem, it has had to establish large housing estates outside its boundaries, *e.g.*, Becontree in Essex (population 115,000), St. Helier at Carshalton in Surrey (population 40,000). This means that other local authorities have to provide all the necessary services, including education, which, in view of the

comparatively low rateable value of these new estates, is by no means a profitable business for them.

The obvious remedy of a Greater London Authority having been rejected, the only alternatives (neither very desirable) are either to give the London County Council powers to supply services outside its own boundaries, or to create separate authorities for special services. The former method has been adopted only in the case of main drainage, the London County Council system serving also parts of Barking, Ilford, Penge, Croydon, Beckenham, Tottenham and Willesden ; and the L.C.C. Fire Brigade has, however, arrangements for mutual assistance with neighbouring authorities. The creation of special authorities proceeds, each new one covering a greater area and population. Thus, whilst the Metropolitan Water Board, which came into existence in 1903, covers 570 square miles and serves a population of 7¼ millions, the London Passenger Transport Board operates over an area of 2,415 square miles and serves a population of 9½ millions. Other such *ad hoc* authorities are the Port of London Authority, The London & Home Counties Joint Electricity Authority, and the Lee Conservancy Catchment Board, the general practice being for the London County Council to nominate a certain number of representatives to serve on each authority.

Chapter 2

THE PROGRESSIVE PHASE
1889—1907

The creation of the London County Council marked the birth of the idea of London as one great city, and gave rise to a spirit of enthusiasm among a number of public-minded men and women, and even aroused a certain proportion of the population from its customary apathy. The first election was on non-party lines, but it was evident that the majority of the 118 elected members were Liberal—or Radical as they were called—so far as national politics were concerned. On the Council they adopted the name of Progressives, the other side selecting the title of Moderates ; the Progressives stood for one great central municipal authority with increasing powers and a forward policy generally, whilst the Moderates represented the point of view of the average ratepayers' association, viz., that the primary object of a Council was to keep down the rates. The division on party lines became apparent at the second meeting of the Council when the 118 elected members had to select

19 aldermen. Each side put forward a list, and the Progressives succeeded in electing no less than 18 on their list. As subsequent events showed, this was an unwise proceeding, and with one other exception, mentioned in due course, aldermen have always been appointed in proportion to the strength of the parties.

Two women were among the victors of the first election and another, Mrs. Emma Cons, subsequently founder of the Old Vic, was made an alderman. The validity of these appointments was challenged in the Courts, and the three ladies were unseated ; it was not until 1907 that sex disqualification was removed by Act of Parliament. When the first L.C.C. election took place, the Fabian Society was in its fifth year. It had a very small membership—indeed, it was only then that it thought it desirable to have a printed annual report—but the Society issued a leaflet in connection with the election entitled, " Questions to Candidates," which was widely circulated. Two members of the Society, the Rev. Stewart Headlam and Mrs. Annie Besant, became members of the London School Board in November, 1888, but it was not until the second election in July, 1892, that members of the Society were elected to the Council. In 1889, the year of the foundation of the Council, the Fabian Society issued a tract, number 8, entitled, " Facts for Londoners, An Exhaustive Collection of Statistical and other Facts relating to the Metropolis with Suggestions for Reform on Socialist Principles." This was the first lengthy publication of the Society, and its undisclosed author was Sidney Webb. The title-page carried the following quotation from Shelley,

" Hell is a City much like London."

Statistics relating to London were practically unknown and had to be dug out, one by one, from obscure and often unpublished sources. Both ingredients of the mixture contained in this tract have left their impress upon the Council, for the statistical portion was the forerunner of the well-known " London Statistics," now published annually by the Council ; and many, although by no means all, of the reforms " on Socialist principles " have been carried out. The tract suggested that the vestries and district boards should be superseded by a uniform system of directly elected councils administering the local affairs of areas fairly equal in population and subject to the control, supervision and audit of the County Council, and that the clerk of each such body should be an independent, whole-time officer. A large part of the inefficiency, stupidity and jobbery of the smaller London vestries had been caused or permitted by the

absurd custom of allowing the vestry clerkship to be an appanage of some old-fashioned and busy firm of solicitors. It also suggested that the districts so administered should be approximately equalised to correspond to the existing Parliamentary constituencies. Other suggestions in connection with both the County Council and the subordinate bodies were : complete publicity for all Council meetings ; complete abolition of all refreshments or hidden perquisites to members ; direct employment of labour wherever possible ; and eight hours a day for all public servants. This and other suggestions were made under the heading of " London Municipal Reform," and it is ironical that this designation should have been adopted eighteen years later as a party label by the Moderates, who to this day fight hard against the adoption of most measures of the character referred to. The tract also contained proposals which became famous some years later under the slogan " Break up the Poor Law," and the prescient suggestion was made that the L.C.C. should create a hospitals committee to supervise and audit all the London medical charities, including the voluntary hospitals, and itself provide all new hospitals. In connection with education, the tract pointed out that all existing training colleges for teachers were denominational, entrance being barred by dogmatic tests, and there was great need, therefore, for the establishment of an unsectarian Training College for London, under public management, so as to bring the training of the teachers into line with the teaching in the schools, and increase the supply of properly trained instructors. The housing question was thoroughly examined and Londoners were told that at least 400,000 new rooms were required. " to house its poorest citizens at the minimum of two decent rooms for one family, not to speak of the ideal of three rooms and a scullery, which should be our ultimate goal," whilst municipal lodging-houses for the very poor were also urged. Other proposals, supported by elaborate statistics, were for the municipalization of the tramways, the water supply and the docks, and a tax on the unearned increment of the landowners.

At the 1892 election, after the Council had been in existence for three years, Sidney Webb and five other members of the Fabian Society were elected, one other being made an alderman. All except Webb were best known to the public as being prominent in Trade Unions or similar organisations, but Webb headed the poll at Deptford and retained his seat until his voluntary retirement eighteen years later. Although elementary education was in the hands of the London School Board,

technical education was one of the duties entrusted to the London County Council, and Webb was immediately made Chairman of the so-called "Technical Education Board." He interpreted technical education as covering everything above elementary education except Greek and theology, and during his eight years in the Chair built up a wonderful system of secondary education and placed university education within the reach of the working people of London. Webb, who retired from his post in the Colonial Office in order to devote most of his time to Council work, was not so conspicuous as some of the better known leaders of the Progressive Party, but his was the brain behind many of the great reforms carried out by that body during the eighteen years of their reign. Apart from Webb, members of the Fabian Society have always played an important part in the work of the Council, and as will be seen later on, their numbers in recent years have assumed remarkable proportions.

Prominent members of the Society who formed part of the Progressive Party included William Stephen Sanders, the Rev. Stewart Headlam, R. C. K. Ensor, J. Ramsay MacDonald, Will Crooks and Robert Phillimore. Susan Lawrence was for some years a Municipal Reform member, subsequently changing her allegiance and actually becoming the first Whip of the Labour Party when that was formed after the 1919 election.

There was no Labour Party in those days, but a wing of the Progressive Party, under the leadership of John Burns, consisting of Trade Unionists, was known as the Labour Bench, and the Fabian members of the Council invariably worked and voted with it.

As already stated, the Council started with a Progressive majority, which appointed the Earl of Rosebery, a former Foreign Minister, as its Chairman. The Council immediately tackled the problem of public health. It had no control, to begin with, over the local sanitary authorities, but it appointed at once a Medical Officer of Health for the County, used to the fullest extent such powers as it possessed, and urged, frequently with success, upon the Government of the day the necessity of additional legislation. It investigated the causes of outbreaks of disease, which meant fighting the vested interests ; it exposed the remissness of the smaller local authorities, and grappled with the problem of the food supply. It represented to the Government the urgent necessity of amending the housing laws, and in 1890 the Housing of the Working Classes Act was passed, which placed large powers in the hands of the Council.

Prior to the formation of the London County Council there was no limit to the height to which buildings could be carried. On this and other points connected with buildings the Council was able to get several improvements embodied in its annual General Powers Bill, which, in spite of strong opposition from the ground landlords, became law. In its quite early days the Council passed a resolution that any person or firm tendering for any of the Council's contracts should sign a declaration that it paid such rates of wages and observed such hours of labour as were generally accepted as fair in their trade. This " fair wages clause " led to much difficulty in obtaining tenders, and a very considerable rise in prices in such tenders as were received. For instance, for the construction of the York Road sewer, in front of the present County Hall, which the Council's Chief Engineer estimated could be done for £7,000, only two tenders were received, amounting to £11,588 and £11,608 respectively. The Council thereupon instructed the Chief Engineer to do the work by the direct employment of labour, which he did at a cost of £5,163, omission of work to the value of £1,945 having been made. As a result, the Council decided to set up a Works Department, controlled by a special committee, to carry out all such works which the Council might resolve to execute without the intervention of a contractor. This was strenuously opposed by the Moderate Party, whose bitterness at the notion of cutting out contractors' profits was such that for two years it refused to serve on the Works Committee at all. In 1896 some grave irregularities were discovered in the book-keeping of the Works Department ; the manager and five of his subordinates had made entries which caused it to appear that the total saving effected by the Department was spread over nearly all the works in hand, whereas the saving was really being made on only two-thirds of them. None of the persons concerned therein derived any financial advantage by the fictitious entries, but the offence was a serious one, and they were summarily dismissed. No member of the Council had been in any way involved in the matter, and the fallacious figures were discovered in the course of the elaborate examination and checking of the accounts which was carried out by the Comptroller, the chief financial officer of the Council.

This gave the contractors and their friends the opportunity they had been waiting for, and although the report of the two professional experts engaged by the Council to make a searching investigation showed that absolutely nothing in the way of embezzlement or misappropriation of money had occurred, and

although the report of the special committee appointed stated that "The experience of the Council, the practice of the other municipal bodies, of railway companies, and large manufacturers and estate proprietors, has led us to a firm conviction that some definite organisation for the direct employment of labour and the direct execution of public works by the Council under the superintendence of its own officers is desirable and beneficial," the Moderates, when they came into power, abolished this hated Department.

It was not until the Council had been in existence two years that the Moderates took a definite stand against municipal ownership of public utilities. The Council had the right to purchase all the tramway undertakings at various dates maturing on the expiration of 21 years from the time they were authorised. Some fifteen tramway undertakings owned and worked about 90 miles of track in various parts of London. The companies had naturally selected what they thought the best paying routes, without regard to connecting services, and through journeys such as we have to-day were unknown. The first section to fall under the operation of the purchase clause was a length of 4¼ miles belonging to the London Street Tramway Company, and the Progressive majority decided to give the necessary six months' notice. This had to be approved at a special meeting of the Council, and two-thirds of the members had to be present and vote. The Moderates were so bitterly opposed to any undertaking being taken out of the hands of private owners that on two consecutive occasions they walked out of the chamber to prevent the vote being effective. It was only after an agreed amendment by which the Council declared its intention of not itself working or of seeking power to work the tramways, but to lease them, that it was possible to get the requisite majority. It is interesting to note that for this short section of line the company claimed £604,090, that the arbitrator, Sir Frederick Bramwell (afterwards Lord Bramwell) awarded £64,540, and that this reduction of nearly 90 per cent. was eventually approved by the House of Lords. Subsequently other sections matured for purchase, lines North of the Thames were leased to a company, whilst those South of the Thames were worked by the Council which, in 1906, re-purchased the lease of those North of the Thames and worked them as one system. In 1933 the whole service was merged with other transport undertakings into the London Passenger Transport Board.

In its hostility to public ownership the Conservative Party in London is different from its congeners in the provinces, with

whom municipal ownership of transport, gas, water, electricity, etc., is a self-understood thing. A possible explanation of this difference in attitude may be found in the fact that London is the great financial centre of the world, and that the financial interests in the City are strongly opposed to the capital of the Empire proving that intermediate profits can be dispensed with.

Ten years of improved centralised government in London were more than sufficient to show the vested interests that, unless they could throw sand into the machine, the good old times had come to an end altogether, so the Conservative Party, under Lord Salisbury, conceived the brilliant idea of building up, on the basis of the Vestries and District Boards, 28 rival authorities within the area of the County of London. Accordingly, the London Government Act of 1899 was passed, which created 28 Borough Councils and gave them in numerous respects independent powers calculated to bring them into constant conflict with the London County Council, and perpetuating the almost criminal error of separate divisions of one great city being independent sanitary authorities; as though an epidemic recognised artificial boundaries of this description! A certain devolution of powers to smaller bodies may be useful, but this was not the object of the measure. The Corporation of the City of London, which was becoming anxious as to whether the growth of London proper might not diminish some of its ancient and exceedingly valuable privileges, joyfully allied itself with these new local authorities in hostility to the central body—hostility which to a certain extent persists to this day, as indeed it was intended to do. Curiously enough, under a Labour Council relations have been improved, even with Municipal Reform boroughs.

In the same year as the Borough Councils were formed, the Council got through Parliament an Act for the clearance of a slum area between the Strand and Holborn and the creation of a new thoroughfare now known as Kingsway. This was the greatest scheme of town improvement that has ever been before Parliament, and it was not until a Labour Council was in existence that any other scheme approaching it in magnitude was begun, *e.g.*, the South Bank of the Thames and the Bethnal Green schemes.

The Education Acts of 1902 and 1903 abolished the old school boards, and their schools and those of the voluntary agencies, mostly denominational (*i.e.*, " non-provided " schools) were placed under the control of the Council on 1st May, 1904. The Technical Education Board now disappeared, and an

Education Committee was set up, under a scheme prepared by the Board of Education, which provided for the inclusion on the committee of a number of non-members of the Council specially qualified to deal with educational matters. This principle of co-opting a few outside members has proved to be very useful, and was subsequently extended to the Public Assistance, Mental Hospitals and certain Hospital Committees of the Council. The Council, under its General Powers Act of 1934, obtained power to add co-opted members to all its committees except the Finance Committee, but has not yet acted upon it. In 1905 the Council started a service of passenger steamboats on the Thames ; both parties agreed to this, popular feeling being in favour of the scheme. Although nearly 4,000,000 passengers were carried during the first year there was a loss of £50,000. The following season (1906) was one of the coldest and wettest on record, and it was decided that the service should not be maintained during the winter. For that year a deficit of £40,000 was made. The subsequent fate of this service is described in the next chapter.

The Council had been carrying on its ever-growing work in the premises of the former Metropolitan Board of Works in Spring Gardens ; but these were quite inadequate, and after considerable discussion a site on the South side of the Thames, adjoining Westminster Bridge, was selected and plans prepared for what is now The County Hall. The construction of this building was voted at the last meeting of the Council prior to the 1907 election, which marked the termination of the government of London by the Progressive Party.

Chapter 3

MUNICIPAL REFORMERS VERSUS PROGRESSIVES 1907—1919

In the Election of 1907 the " Moderates," or " Municipal Reformers " as they now called themselves, scored a decisive victory, to understand which it is necessary to go back a year or so.

The Progressives had incurred the bitter hostility of all those vested interests which naturally resented activities tending to restrict their profits. Property owners, in particular, were opposed to the Progressives, and a tendency on the part of the Council to be over-zealous in the cause of temperance and to be a " Mrs. Grundy " so far as entertainments were concerned, aroused a certain amount of resentment on the part of the general public. The Progressives, too, were becoming slack,

and too much accustomed to having their own way, besides which they were torn by internal dissensions arising from the 1902 Education Act ; one section—the Nonconformist section—was bitterly opposed to rate-aid for Church of England and Roman Catholic schools, whilst the other took the Fabian view that the all-important thing was that London children should receive adequate educational facilities.

After the Parliamentary Election of 1906 no less than 29 members of the Progressive Party were Members of Parliament. The presence of a few Members of Parliament on the Council forms a valuable *liaison* between the two bodies, but it is not easy for everyone to give adequate time to both, and many of the Progressives represented constituencies hundreds of miles distant from the metropolis, which absorbed much of their time and energy. The Municipal Reformers mobilised all the forces against the Progressive Party, collected large sums from the vested interests (including at least one of the big Railway Companies) and plastered the walls of London with a poster depicting a hideous man with an outstretched grabbing hand, wearing a top hat, labelled " PROGRESSIVE SOCIALIST PARTY " with the inscription below " IT'S YOUR MONEY WE WANT." The majority on the outgoing Council was accused of extravagance, the new County Hall was termed " The Wastrels' Palace," and so successful were these efforts that 55.5 per cent. of the electors voted, as against the more usual 33 per cent., this latter figure holding good to the present day. Of the 118 members returned, 79 belonged to the Municipal Reform Party.

The efforts of the new Council were directed more to destruction than construction. The Tramways, Works Department, Steamboats and the Electrical Scheme were specially singled out for attack. This last scheme should be mentioned. In 1898 a large number of Bills were introduced into Parliament giving powers to Companies for the bulk supply of electricity, and a Conference of London Local Authorities passed resolutions that the London County Council should be empowered to apply the purchase clause of the Electric Lighting Act, 1888, to the London Companies. After various happenings too lengthy to mention, the Council had in 1906 prepared a Bill which provided for the construction of a generating station at Barking, and conferred upon it the powers of purchase then vested in various local authorities to take over the Company undertakings in 1931. This involved an ultimate expenditure of £4,500,000, and although it would have been productive and have saved London consumers vast sums, the publication of these figures

just before the 1907 Election helped the Municipal Reformers to alarm the ratepayers. It remains to be added that the Council did ultimately secure these powers, and when in 1929 the question of using them arose (admittedly, with numerous complications), the Municipal Reformers were successful, against Labour opposition, in retarding such date of repurchase until 1971 !

The Municipal Reformers decided to shut down the steamboat service, and the boats were laid up for the whole of the summer of 1908, which, with characteristic perversity, proved to be one of brilliant sunshine. As this was the year of the great Franco-British Exhibition, which attracted millions of visitors to London, the service would almost certainly have shown a profit for that period. At the end of 1908 the Council advertised in this country and abroad inviting offers for the purchase of the boats, and these were ultimately sold at a very low price. In 1909 the motorisation of the Fire Brigade was begun.

That the London electorate was not captivated by a policy largely negative was revealed at the March, 1910, Election, when the results showed that 59 Municipal Reformers had been returned and 58 Progressives, whilst in one division (Central Finsbury) there was a tie for one seat. A recount gave 2,460 votes to the Municipal Reformer and 2,459 to the Progressive, and this one vote literally determined London policy for some years, for, with their majority of one, the Municipal Reformers appropriated the whole of the ten aldermanic vacancies, which gave them a working majority.

The cheeseparing policy generally followed by the Municipal Reform Party was too much for the Board of Education, which in the year of the election actually fined the Council £10,000, by withholding grants to that amount, for its failure to arrange for an adequate reduction (to a maximum of sixty !) in the size of school classes. In 1912 King George V laid the foundation-stone of the new County Hall, and ten years later formally opened the new building.

The Election of 1913 brought little change in the composition of the parties on the Council, and the Council pursued the even tenor of its way, which meant that it continued to carry out its statutory duties at the minimum possible cost. As a result of this policy municipal London ceased to exist so far as the Press was concerned, for if no new activities are undertaken the ablest journalist cannot make a " story."

The War provided the Municipal Reform majority with a good excuse for their quiescent policy. In 1915, however, after

having postponed action for several years, the Council started the accident ambulance service, the white cars of which are now, unfortunately, so familiar a feature of the streets. The large green ambulances, bearing the name of the Council, are quite distinct from the hospital service, and are used for the conveyance to and from school of physically defective children.

No elections were held during the War, the 1913 Council remaining in office until March, 1919. The Representation of the People Act, 1918, increased the number of members of the Council from 137 to 144, including 20 aldermen, and more than doubled the electorate.

Chapter 4

THE THREE-PARTY PERIOD 1919—1934

Under the auspices of the London Labour Party, which was formed in 1914, a number of Labour candidates ran under that label at the 1919 Election. Seventeen of these were elected, and Labour made its first appearance as an independent party on the L.C.C. Among the successful candidates were Harry Snell, Susan Lawrence, Dr. Haden Guest and C. G. Ammon, all Fabians. The new party was entitled to one alderman, and at its first meeting did the writer of this booklet the honour of appointing him to that post ; and from this point, without any apology, the first person singular will be used in this narrative.

For the first time in its history the Council had two oppositions. On an arithmetical basis each was entitled to a fraction of an alderman ; as this was biologically impossible, it was finally decided that the Labour Party should have a second alderman, and the late C. J. Mathew, K.C., a former Liberal M.P. and Progressive member of the Council, was appointed to this post, bringing the Labour ranks up to a total of 19, of whom five were members of the Fabian Society. The Municipal Reform Party, however, still had control of the Council, their majority over both oppositions (if and when these voted together) being about 30. We of the Labour Party were a mixed lot ; apart from the Fabian members, we consisted for the most part of trade union officials. One colleague, a gentleman from Shoreditch, whose occupation was wrapped in mystery, occupied the seat next to me, and in the very first debate, which was on Housing, electrified the assembly by asserting in stentorian tones that he had fleas in his house " as big as elephants." Our leader, Harry Gosling, was an official of the Lightermen's

Union, which was absorbed by the Transport Workers' Union. He had been a member of the Council since 1898, and was a most lovable character. It is to be feared that he often came to the Council without having read the agenda of the meeting, but his knowledge of procedure, his transparent honesty and general popularity carried him through, and by virtue of constant admonitions he succeeded in educating his raw recruits to a sense of what was required of them. Some of our members needed to learn that propagandist speeches which were effective at a street corner carried no weight in a body like the Council. Susan Lawrence was the first Whip of the party, and her experience on the Council and her extraordinary knowledge of the standing orders, and possibly her acquaintance with the weaknesses of the other side derived from her former membership of that party, made her and us a terror to the chairmen of the Council and the majority party generally.

After the War the housing shortage called for prompt and energetic action—characteristics for which the majority party was not famed. They had, however, appointed as Chairman of the Council Lord Downham, better known under the name of Hayes Fisher. Although a former Municipal Reform member of the Council, Lord Downham was a keen housing reformer, and was not afraid to criticise his former colleagues, for, referring to his own activities when he was head of the Local Government Board (now the Ministry of Health), he said : " I did not think the Council's actual programme for new houses was commensurate with the proved necessities of the situation." Under his stimulus and that of the Government, with Dr. Addison as the Minister concerned, together with Labour pressure, and on the assurance that its annual expenditure thereon would be limited to a penny rate, the Council announced a big building programme, and in 1920 acquired 3,900 acres for that purpose. This was the start of Becontree, the dormitory town in Essex, 12 miles distant from Charing Cross, with a population at the present day of 115,000. Little else of note was accomplished by that Council.

In 1922 the Municipal Reformers increased their predominance by 14 seats, at the expense of the Progressives, but Labour, through a by-election held shortly afterwards and an aldermanic appointment, increased its membership from nineteen to twenty-one. Among the newly-elected members was Herbert Morrison, who two years previously had stood unsuccessfully at a by-election in North Southwark. During the life of that Council there were three General Elections, and the first Labour Government was

formed. This brought about changes in the membership of the party on the Council, and between 1922 and 1925 the leadership was held for varying periods by C. G. Ammon, Cecil Manning, and myself. On 17th July, 1922, the fine new County Hall was formally opened by King George V., who was accompanied by Queen Mary. Apart from housing, few things of importance were carried out by the Municipal Reform majority during this Council's three years of office. As one of their chairmen put it, " the watchwords of the Council during the past year have been economy and efficiency." In this year, in a non-party division, the Council adopted a resolution permitting games in the parks on Sundays.

The Progressive Party on the Council was visibly in a state of disintegration. Some of its members only held their seats through an understanding with their former opponents to leave them a clear field against Labour, and in crucial divisions some of the Progressive members went into the lobby with the reactionaries. By 1925, when the next Election took place, some of the Progressives had joined the Municipal Reform Party, whilst others had come over to the Labour Party, and after that Election Labour became the principal opposition and the Progressive Party ceased to count in London municipal affairs.

After the 1925 Election the Municipal Reform Party still held the reins, but the Progressive Party had dwindled to a handful of half-a-dozen, and Labour with 35 elected members and 5 aldermen became the principal opposition. Herbert Morrison succeeded me as Leader of the Party, and has held the position ever since, except during the period when he was Minister of Transport in the Labour Government of 1929-31, when Lewis Silkin occupied the post. It is due largely to Morrison's extraordinary gift of leadership that the Labour Party on the Council has achieved its present position.

During the life of the 1925-1928 Council the need for post-war economy was the excuse for going slow, and the only developments of note were in the domain of housing. The Watling estate at Hendon was begun, and the lease of $2\frac{3}{4}$ acres of land around Kennington Oval cricket ground was acquired from the Duchy of Cornwall for the construction of block dwellings. Still under the plea of economy, and against the most vigorous Labour opposition, the Municipal Reform majority resolved upon the erection of a " simplified " type of dwelling in which one bathroom was deemed sufficient for three families. Of little importance, but of some interest, were the conclusions

of a special committee, of which I was a member, to consider the adoption of a suitable motto for London. Hundreds of suggestions were received, but nothing suitable was found, and London still has to struggle along without that appendage.

On the 7th January, 1928, something happened which shocked the whole of London. An exceptionally high flood caused the Thames to overflow, and fourteen persons sleeping in basements in Westminster, Southwark and the City were drowned. The danger level of flood protection works had not been fixed high enough by the Council to withstand a flood of these dimensions. The Council subsequently instituted a survey of all the river defences in the County, and arrangements are now made whereby the police give warning of approaching danger from floods.

If it has been possible to deal very briefly with the few important events in the Council's history from the assumption of power by the Municipal Reform party up to this time, this ceases to be the case when one comes to the year 1930, for on 1st April, 1930, the L.C.C. became responsible for the administration of all forms of poor relief in London, including the services maintained by the Metropolitan Asylums Board. This meant the taking over of the duties and institutions of thirty Poor Law authorities, including Boards of Guardians and the M.A.B. In virtue of the Local Government Act of 1929 Parliament had gone a good part of the way towards breaking up the Poor Law as advocated by the Minority Report of the Royal Commission of 1905-1909. When it is realised that this meant taking over infirmaries and workhouses with accommodation for about 60,000 people without counting the hospitals and institutions of the M.A.B., the magnitude of the task becomes evident. These changes meant the transfer to the Council of a staff of 26,000 persons, and only those with actual experience know what such an operation means ; even to-day, nearly seven years after the transfer, the assimilation to the Council's conditions of employment (salaries, emoluments, holidays, sick pay, etc.) and allocation to the various grades of the whole of the staff taken over is not quite complete, negotiations still having to be entered into with the numerous unions and associations concerned ; a point which ardent reformers, confident that the transition to Socialism could be effected smoothly within a few months, should note, unless, of course, they are prepared to coerce the workers by force. For a year previously a special committee of the Council had been engaged upon the preparation of an administrative scheme for the carrying out of the functions transferred to the Council, and this scheme was approved by

the Minister of Health on 30th October, 1929. Under the Act, the Council had to appoint a Public Assistance Committee, but, unlike other local authorities, the L.C.C. had power to provide for the reference or delegation to any of its committees of all the functions transferred under the Act, except the power of borrowing money. It became possible, therefore, to pass over to the Public Health, Education, Mental Hospitals and Care of the Blind Committees some of the duties which had been previously carried out under the Poor Law—in other words, to remove from the Poor Law certain categories of people. The advantage of placing friendless children, for instance, in residential schools under the control of the Education Committee is obvious. In deciding in principle to convert what were Poor Law infirmaries into municipal hospitals available to all Londoners the Council pursued an enlightened policy, spoiled, however, as was almost always the case throughout the period of Municipal Reform control, by the policy of "economy" as they termed it, or "parsimony" as their opponents regarded it, besides their reluctance to abandon every evidence of the Poor Law. The development of the hospital services is dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

The March, 1931, Election resulted in the return of 83 Municipal Reformers, 35 Labour and 6 Progressives.

The crisis which occurred in the following autumn led to the overthrow of the Labour Government and the formation and subsequent electoral victory of the National Government. The £ which the Government was formed to "save" went, and the Government called for economy in all departments of national activity. That the Municipal Reform Party should have responded to this invitation is not surprising, but as a witness and participant in the proceedings of the Council at that time, I must state the conviction that the call for economy was received and acted upon by the leaders of that party as a heaven-sent opportunity and justification for slowing down every form of activity into which circumstances and interfering governments had forced them. Housing and educational developments were the chief sufferers, a typical example being the abolition of school prizes, which cost £12,500 a year, and such long overdue improvements as were necessary at the Elephant and Castle and Vauxhall Cross, as well as certain bridge reconstructions, were again put off indefinitely. In the following year King George V opened Lambeth Bridge, replacing the old bridge which, typically enough, had been closed to vehicular traffic for twenty-two years. On 1st July, 1933, the L.C.C. tramways system was transferred

to the London Passenger Transport Board. The Municipal Reformers had intended that the tramways should have gone to a traffic combine in which the majority control would have been private capitalistic enterprise, and it supported a Bill to this effect. It was only the overthrow of the Baldwin Government in 1929 which prevented this Bill from becoming law. Another Bill, prepared by Herbert Morrison as Minister of Transport in the Labour Government of 1929–1931, although somewhat mutilated by the subsequent National Government, secured public ownership of London Passenger Transport in all its forms, except taxi-cabs.

Chapter 5

THE FIRST LABOUR COUNCIL 1934—1937

On 9th March, 1934, London learned at breakfast that for the first time in its history it was to be governed by Socialists. Although there had been prophecies of the direst ruin in such an event, the Stock Exchange remained calm, and there was no fall in the quotations of L.C.C. loans ! The elections, at which 33.5 per cent. of the electorate voted, as against only 27.8 per cent. at the previous contest, showed that 69 Labour candidates, 55 Municipal Reformers and no Progressives had been returned. On filling the aldermanic seats to which they were entitled the Labour Party numbered 80 against 64 of its opponents. Lord Snell, a former member of the Council, was elected Chairman, and Herbert Morrison, as leader of the new majority party, became Leader of the Council.

The share of the Fabian Society in this victory was only fully revealed when, in the following year, by a happy thought of Dr. Eric Fletcher, a member of the Council and the Fabian executive, those L.C.C. members who were at the same time members of the Society gave a dinner, with myself in the chair, to their two distinguished Fabian colleagues, Lord Snell and Herbert Morrison, F. W. Galton also being invited so that the Society should be officially represented by its secretary. It was then found that apart from the Chairman and Leader of the Council, seventeen members of the Society were elected members of the Council, and eight were aldermen ; furthermore, that practically fifty per cent. of the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the important committees of the Council were included in this gathering.

It might have been thought that a party coming into power without any previous experience of office would make some

disastrous mistakes ; but the following prognostication which I made in a small book on the L.C.C. published in 1925 (now out of print) has proved to be correct :—

> " Members of the other parties admit that the advent of a Labour Party to the Council has livened up the proceedings of that body very considerably. People feel that there is a real opposition, an opposition which, although for the moment constituting only one-sixth of the Council, is confident that it is only a question of time before it holds the reins at County Hall. Its members have occupied themselves with mastering the procedure of the Council and learning the inconspicuous but most important routine of committee work. They have played their part in all the functions of the Council, and the Party is now a trained nucleus on which the future majority may safely be built up."

One of the difficulties with which the new Council was faced was the fact that its predecessors had left an enormous amount of arrears of necessary work, requiring heavy expenditures. While it was obvious that the electorate was prepared for an increase in rates, it was equally clear that there was a limit in this direction beyond which it would be unwise to go ; in spite of this limitation, however, much has been accomplished in every domain.

With the advent of the Labour Party to power, a new spirit spread throughout every department of the Council's activities. After an interval of twenty-seven years London municipal affairs again became news.

Seeing that in its first triennium the Labour majority has accomplished and set going more than any three previous Councils under Municipal Reform administration put together, it is obviously impossible in the space of this pamphlet to detail all this activity. This is the less necessary in that such information is given in the twenty-six page pamphlet, entitled " WHAT LABOUR HAS DONE FOR LONDON " (1½d. post-free from London Labour Party, 258, Westminster Bridge Road, S.E.1). What I propose to do in the following pages is to deal with certain characteristic and little-known aspects of the work of the Council, under a Labour majority.

Publicity

It has always been complained that there is no real civic spirit in London. A first essential to remove this reproach is that the public should be informed of what the Council is doing, and reminded that it is not merely a body making restrictive

by-laws. Herbert Morrison, as Leader of the Council, gave regular audiences to Press representatives. Advantage was taken of the Silver Jubilee festivities to arrange for the permanent flood-lighting at night of County Hall, the cost of which, it is interesting to note, works out at only 4s. per hour. It was found that in the case of many of the operations of the Council, such as slum clearance and the construction of large block dwellings, there was nothing to show the public that these were being done for the Council; this was remedied, and an order given that all the establishments of the Council should display its name and, as far as practicable, its coat of arms. More frequent *communiqués* to the Press are issued by the Council, and these, being official, are of course non-political in character. Committee reports published in the Council's agenda dealing with matters of interest to the public are now written in less formal language, and various other means of familiarising and interesting the public in the work of the Council are employed. Prominent among these is the holding at County Hall of free exhibitions. These were started—I am proud to say, on my initiative—in March, 1935, when there was a striking display of the work of the Council's Art Schools. This attracted considerable attention and was visited, among others, by the then Prince of Wales. In June, 1935, in connection with the Silver Jubilee, an exhibition illustrating the progress of local government in London during the King's reign was held at County Hall, occupying the large conference hall and seventeen other rooms. This was a revelation to the public of the scope of the Council's activities. Displays by children and students were given, and the exhibition proved to be extraordinarily popular, being described by one newspaper as the finest show in London. The attendance, during the nine days the exhibition was open, exceeded 140,000. In January, 1937, an exhibition under the title "Design in Education" was held at County Hall. This was organised in conjunction with the Council for Art and Industry and the Education Committees of Kent, Middlesex and Birmingham, and in February, 1937, there is being held an exhibition of the work of the pupils of the Junior Technical Institutes maintained by the Council. An exhibition of the work of Evening Class students was displayed at Charing Cross Underground Railway Station in October, 1936, and resulted in the addition of a large number of students to these institutes. Increased attention is also given to advertising by posters (largely on the Council's own sites, but also by means of a reciprocal arrangement with the London Passenger Transport Board) of the facilities offered by the Council. The effects of this

policy were quickly shown by an increase of nearly 7,000 in the number of students who enrolled for tuition at the Council's Evening Institutes, whilst the number of applications for loans for house-purchase was doubled by the same means.

By all these and other efforts something is being accomplished in the way of arousing a civic spirit among Londoners, and also among the employees of the Council itself. A lady, examining the flower-beds in one of the parks, inquired of the park-keeper, " Do these flowers belong to the primula family ? " " No, madam," was the proud reply, " they belong to the London County Council ! "

The Problem of East London

The slum problem of London is insoluble if done by way of small isolated schemes. East London, for instance, is, with very few exceptions, one long series of slums, and the only satisfactory method of dealing with it is by the re-development of a whole district, closing some of the streets, widening others, providing open spaces, and re-arranging the location of housing and industrial premises ; and when this has been done with one district, renewing the operation with another. Before attempting such a scheme provision must be made to re-house, temporarily (*decant* is the technical term), the displaced slum dwellers during the time required for the rebuilding of their old district, and the East End contains practically no sites available for this purpose. Recognising the urgency of the problem, the Labour majority, in 1936, decided to put forward a scheme for building block dwellings adequate for this purpose on a portion of Hackney Marsh, a publicly-owned open space within easy access of the crowded areas of Bethnal Green and Stepney. The area selected consisted of 30 out of the 340 acres of Hackney Marsh, and was the least attractive portion for recreational purposes ; the scheme included provision of an equal amount of open space elsewhere—some five miles distant, it must be admitted. The Labour Party realised that such a proposal would encounter opposition, some genuine, and some not entirely disinterested, but resolved to face it in the conviction that without some such big scheme the problem of the East End could not be tackled. Legal and other difficulties arose, but were finally disposed of by the public-spirited co-operation of a gentleman who enabled the Council to acquire as open space the only other available site in the neighbourhood, consisting of 20½ acres. Blocks of flats to house approximately 4,800 persons from slum areas are being erected,

and render possible the first comprehensive re-development scheme undertaken in the East End. This means the practical re-development of 46 acres in Bethnal Green. Actually, the area dealt with is greater, for 14 acres of adjacent property are being re-planned to fit in with the clearance of the area, forming an integral area of 60 acres on modern housing and town planning principles. Special districts in the area will be set apart for industry, and existing factories, workshops and retail shops will be allocated to their appropriate zones. The area referred to contains about 1,000 houses and is a typical example of uncontrolled building of the past. The number of people who are to be displaced is about 5,000, and the accommodation to be provided in the new blocks of flats which will be erected on the site thus cleared will, it is estimated, be sufficient for between six and seven thousand people. Thus a real start is being made with the re-development of East London.

The Humanising Spirit

In Fabian Tract No. 8, " Facts for Londoners," written by Sidney Webb in 1889, and referred in to Chapter 2, appears the following paragraph :—

> " Thus the Poor Law needs abundant reform ; but the change above all others necessary is in the spirit of its administrators. Instead of a harsh and cruel desire to ' save the rates ' at any cost of human suffering, we need a kindly treatment of the sick, the aged, the children, and those reduced to destitution by accident or misfortune ; coupled with a scientific and persistent effort temporarily to relieve the able-bodied and permanently to remove the causes of their misery, without in any way relaxing the tests against sturdy idleness or vagrancy. Even as regards these latter evils the abolition of their causes rather than the punishment of the offenders should constantly be aimed at."

It is this matter of humanising not only Poor Law administration, but every contact with the public, that characterises the Labour Party and differentiates it from its opponents on the Council. There are members of the Municipal Reform Party who give up their time to perform unpaid work for their fellow citizens to the same extent as members of the Labour Party ; but the spirit which animates them is not the same. If, as sometimes occurs, there appears among them a member who starts off by being enthusiastic and urging extensions or improvements which would

cost money, he is soon given to understand that that is the last thing that is expected from him. During the eighteen years I have thus far spent upon the Council, I have always had the feeling that Municipal Reform policy is enforced more from the outside than from within.

Directly Labour gained its majority in 1934 this new spirit was manifested in every department of the Council's administration. The granting of a weekly allowance of 4 oz. of sweets to women and children in institutions and to men who do not smoke, or an alternative allowance of snuff (which several of the old people prefer), may sound a small thing to well-to-do people, but these trivialities constitute a very important factor in the monotonous lives of people compelled to live in institutions. The spirit referred to has found expression in changing as far as possible the character of the old barrack-like mixed workhouses, getting old people into small houses with home-like conditions, sending friendless children from the Council's residential schools for school journeys in company with more fortunately placed children from elementary schools, opening a barber's shop as much like real life as possible for the male inmates of a mental hospital, and a modest "beauty parlour" for the women inmates to enhance their self respect, improving the living accommodation for nursing and other staff in the hospitals, etc., improving dietaries—all these and hundreds of other things are being done at no excessive cost, but resulting in a definite addition to human happiness, or mitigation of unhappiness, as the case may be.

Labour Conditions

The influence of the Council upon Labour conditions outside its own services is little realised. Every contractor engaged on work for, or supplying goods to, the Council is subject to what is known as the Council's Fair Wages Clause. This clause stipulates that wages and hours shall be not less favourable than those recognised by employers and trade unions, or, in the absence of such recognised rates and hours, the rates and hours shall be those which in practice obtain amongst good employers in the district. The Council inspects the works of manufacturers and others to see that these conditions are complied with, and its inspectors promptly investigate any complaint that these are not adhered to. There were, however, several loopholes in the clause as it existed. While it stipulated that contractors and sub-contractors were required to observe the prescribed rates of pay and conditions on the Council's work, no stipulation was made as to the rates and conditions observed by contractors

in their ordinary business. It was possible, therefore, for contracts to be given to employers who undertook to observe Trade Union agreements on the Council's work, but did not act in accordance with such agreements in their ordinary work. The new Fair Wages Clause, which operates as from 1st January, 1937, stipulates that no tender or quotation shall be accepted from, or contract entered into with, any person or firm who does not pay all his employees *on all his work*, whether for the Council or for other persons, such rates of wages, and observe such hours and conditions of labour, as are recognised by associations of Employers and Trade Unions, or (in the absence of recognised rates, hours and conditions) the rates of wages and hours and conditions of labour which in practice obtain amongst good employers in the districts in which such person or firm carries on work.

It is further provided that the contractor will not do or knowingly suffer to be done any act or thing intended or calculated to discourage any person or persons employed, or about to be employed, by him, whether in connection with this contract or otherwise, from becoming or continuing as a member or members of a Trade Union or Trade Unions, and will not in any way penalise any such person by reason of his membership of a Trade Union.

The above conditions apply to sub-contractors as well as contractors.

Sir Walter Citrine, the Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, has stated that that body has for years been pressing the Government to adopt some such far-reaching clause, and that this action of the Council is of the utmost importance and assistance.

L.C.C. as Farmer

The Council operates a number of farms in connection with its numerous institutions in the country, the total area worked being 3,820 acres. The Mental Hospitals service alone has fourteen farms including 713 acres of arable land and 984 under pasture. Milk to the value of over £40,000 in one year is produced from the herds of these farms. Other departments of the Council maintaining farms are the Education, General Hospitals and Public Assistance services. This last trains unemployed men at Hollesley Farm, Suffolk (1,350 acres) and Dunton Farm, Essex (100 acres). The Council is one of the few farmers in the country keeping accurate accounts, and, speaking generally, profits are earned, besides ensuring a large amount of fresh food supplies for the Council's institutions.

In the accounts credit for produce is taken only at the prices at which they could be sold wholesale.

The Marriage Bar

In August, 1935, the Council removed the provision that women teachers and doctors should be compelled to resign their posts on marriage.

House Purchase

It is not generally known that the L.C.C. carries on what may be described as a Building Society business, *i.e.*, it advances money to assist people to buy their own houses within the county, or to provide houses for letting at reasonable rents. At the present time the rate of interest charged on such advances is as low as $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. per annum. The Council may lend up to 90 per cent. of its valuation of the property, but is precluded by law from making advances on any house the purchase price of which is over £800. Prior to 31st October, 1935, this figure was £1,200, but (presumably as the cheapness of this service did not meet with approval in certain interested quarters), the Government reduced the maximum to £800. Through the policy already mentioned of making the Council's service better known there was a large increase in applications, the amount advanced in a twelvemonth having risen from £139,590 during the last year of the Municipal Reform régime, to £268,780 during the second year of the Labour administration.

Fire Insurance

Ever since the Council took over the functions of the London School Board it has continued the policy adopted by that body of carrying part of the fire risk on its properties. The method adopted is to charge to the fund the same rate of premium as is paid to the Fire Insurance Offices, and also to debit it with all other expenses incurred, including a proportionate allowance for overhead expenses. So successful has been this inherited department of municipal trading that it has been possible year by year to increase the proportion of the insurance carried by the fund, and at 31st March, 1935, this was £38,265,625 out of a total of £59,909,560. The premiums paid into the fund during the year ended 31st March, 1935, amounted to £9,638 and the losses to only £594. In insurance, however, no one year can be taken as typical, but if we take the 10 years terminating March, 1935, the average annual premium received by the fund was £10,334, and the average annual loss from fire £1,877. As no part of these annual surpluses had to be paid

out in dividends to shareholders, they were invested year by year, and at 31st March, 1935, this fund (all profit for the ratepayers of London) amounted to £574,022. Owing to certain internal provisions which cannot be mentioned here, the saving to the ratepayers of London is even larger than is shown by these figures ; but they are sufficient to give rise to congratulation, and to explain the prosperity of fire insurance companies.

The Hospital Service

As already stated, the Council in 1930 took over all the Poor Law Infirmaries and Metropolitan Asylums Board establishments and reorganised them as a municipal Hospital Service, which now comprehends about 40,000 beds and 20,000 staff. Three out of every four hospital beds for Londoners are provided by the L.C.C. The Poor Law taint was not, however, wholly removed from the service, and even where the full cost of the service was defrayed by the patient, it was assessed and collected by the Public Assistance Committee. This was all quickly changed by Labour when it came into power, its proud boast now being that the only way in which a relieving officer can enter an L.C.C. Hospital is by becoming a patient.

It is not generally known that every inhabitant of London requiring hospital treatment is entitled to enter one of the L.C.C. Hospitals. The law actually prescribes that the Council shall not refuse any case requiring treatment, and this provision is sometimes made use of by voluntary Hospitals ! The Council aims at making its hospital service the finest in the world. Medical and nursing staffs have been largely increased, the working time of the nurses has been reduced to 54 hours weekly, and a 48 hour week has been introduced for the domestic staff. Much money requires to be spent before all the hospitals are up-to-date, but at the present time, of the Council's 74 general and special hospitals no less than 37 are being enlarged, modernised, or otherwise improved ; a new hospital is planned in South London, and a women's convalescent home is being established at Margate. Every hospital now has its almoner, and the total cost for in-patients in these hospitals varies between £3 and £5 10s. 0d. a week. The Council is seeking powers to charge a more equalised rate for each of its hospitals, based on the average cost.

The Council has a corps of specialists, in receipt of regular remuneration, who visit the hospitals, and these include some of the best-known " Harley Street " doctors and surgeons. No

additional charge is made for their services, including any operations that may be necessary. Certain hospitals specialise in diseases. Lambeth Hospital has a highly-specialised unit for cancer cases, providing the latest X-ray and radium therapy treatment; St. James' Hospital, Fulham, has a wonderful plastic surgery unit; New End Hospital, Hampstead, has a goitre unit; St. Mary Abbots Hospital, Kensington, specialises in chest surgery; and Queen Mary's Hospital, Carshalton, is probably the world's foremost hospital for the treatment of crippled children. The Council has also, in conjunction with the Government, created a Post-graduate Medical School for doctors side by side with its Hammersmith Hospital.

The existence of this great medical service is not yet sufficiently known, although a rapidly increasing number of maternity cases go to the Council's hospitals—15,000 last year as against 10,000 in 1931. Hitherto, the black-coated worker, or his wife, needing an operation had to choose between charity and a nursing home costing several guineas a week, plus the fee of the operating surgeon. Now the patient can go at a low cost, including the operation, to a hospital with the most modern equipment, sure of receiving skilled treatment from a medical and nursing staff working regular hours, and under conditions conducive to general efficiency.

It is often alleged that while centralisation makes for efficiency, it tends to be soulless through the absence of the personal factor. I believe that by its constitution of local hospital sub-committees the Council has approached the ideal of combining efficiency with the personal touch, as nearly as is possible in an imperfect world. Each hospital has a committee which includes a number of local people. This committee meets at the hospital once a month, when it receives the reports of the Medical Superintendent and the Matron, investigates all complaints entered in the complaint book or received by letter, takes note of letters of thanks (which it is gratifying to learn are numerous), and deals with staff matters. A clerk from the hospitals administration at County Hall attends each such meeting and acts as a *liaison* officer. In addition, two members of the local committee are designated at each meeting to pay a surprise visit to the hospital during the following month, to walk through the wards, talking to patients, and then to send in a report with their comments and suggestions to the head office.

Mental Hospitals

There are about 34,000 inmates in the Council's Mental Hospitals and institutions for mental deficients, and in two of

these private patients are taken. The Maudsley Hospital on Denmark Hill is unique. It is named after Dr. Maudsley, who gave altogether £40,000 towards its establishment. It does not take any certified cases, but provides means for the early treatment of cases of nervous and mental disorder, and for the investigation of their causes and methods of treatment. It is being enlarged and is a school of the University of London. It is hoped that the public will realise that mental hospitals are now really hospitals and not lunatic asylums.

Chapter 6

THE COUNCIL'S PROCEDURE

The London County Council is the most business-like body of which I have experience. All its meetings, be they of the Council itself or the smallest sub-committee, start sharp to the minute, and the whole procedure has been devised to avoid the waste of a moment. As a Member of Parliament once put it to me, " at County Hall everything seems designed to expedite things ; in Parliament everything seems to have been devised to impede progress." At County Hall there is no tomfoolery. At the appointed moment for a meeting of the Council the Chairman enters, followed by the Vice-Chairman and Deputy-Chairman, members standing until " The Dais," as these three dignitaries are collectively termed, are seated. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman for each year are the nominees of the majority party, whilst the Deputy-Chairman is the representative of the opposition. After questions addressed to chairmen of committees are answered, reports of the various committees of the Council are moved (no seconder being required) and are then open to debate. Members may be referred to either as " the hon. member " or by name, and this latter mode is usually employed. With the exception of the introduction of the annual budget, speeches are strictly limited in time. After the expiration of quarter of an hour the Chairman raps his hammer and states " The hon. member has spoken for fifteen minutes." Members may give permission for the speaker to continue for another ten minutes by calling out " Go on !," but if he is still on his feet at the end of that period he is allowed to continue only by virtue of a resolution moved and seconded and passed by the Council, which must also mention the precise duration of the extended period, *e.g.*, " I move that the hon.

member be allowed to speak for another ten minutes." In practice, it is found that in nine cases out of ten all that can be usefully said can be said within quarter of an hour ; it is the exception for an extension to be required, and the second extension is hardly ever necessary, although one does notice that if a member has been for some years also in Parliament it becomes increasingly difficult for him to express himself concisely. The procedure of the Council and all its committees is regulated by the Standing Orders of the Council, which constitute a code embodying the practice of the Council generally. These are modified or added to from time to time, as experience dictates. The real work of detail is performed at meetings of the various committees of the Council, many of which have sub-committees. The standing committees of the Council are :—

Education.
Entertainments.
Establishment.
Finance.
Fire Brigade and Main Drainage.
General Purposes.
Highways.
Hospitals and Medical Services.
Housing and Public Health.
Mental Hospitals.
Parks.
Parliamentary.
Public Assistance.
Public Control.
Supplies.
Town Planning and Building Regulation.
Welfare of the Blind.

Only the meetings of the main Education Committee and Public Assistance Committee are open to the public. The chief officer of the department concerned attends the meetings of the responsible committee, and may be asked to attend any other committee which requires information or advice. It is in the committees where points at issue are raised and, where necessary, thrashed out.

Reports on matters of importance that have been dealt with on the authority of the Chairman or Vice-Chairman in between the committee meetings are presented, and all important items are supplemented by reports from the chief officer(s) concerned. These reports are often comprehensive, giving all relevant data. The respective advantages and disadvantages of a proposed course of action are pointed out, and alternative methods of dealing with the matter may be stated for the decision of the

committee. The chief officers of the Council, and this may be said of the entire staff, do not concern themselves with party policy, and the reports may, and sometimes do, set forth conclusions which do not support the views of the majority party. Both parties are represented on all committees in proportion to their relative strength. As has already been indicated, detailed consideration of the Council's business (apart from the huge amount of administrative detail which is, of course, done by the staff) is carried on in committees, and not in the Council itself. The latter is more a vehicle for the public expression of opposing views and the placing on record of how members vote on matters of dispute. Although it very seldom happens that a decision of a committee is turned down, the last word obviously rests with the full Council, and there is a very useful clause in the standing orders known as the minority clause, which operates as a safeguard of the democratic principle. This provides that a minority of not less than one-fourth of the committee members present, or any ten members of the Council, may require a decision of a committee to be reported to the next meeting of the Council for its directions, *before action is taken.* Another safeguard is that the Council must be informed of every action of importance that has been taken by a committee, by means of a periodical report printed in the agenda, which affords opportunity for criticism. For instance, the periodical report of the Education Committee may include an item stating that it has refused to let a schoolroom to a particular organisation. Action already taken cannot be changed, but it is open to any member of the Council, on the periodical report being moved, to ask the reasons for such refusal and to move that further information be given, or that the Council regrets the action of the committee, or that it orders that different action shall be taken in the future.

A special committee which revised the Council's procedure in 1933 introduced an innovation of considerable interest, which is likely to be adopted by other authorities. For the first time the positions of the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition were recognised as forming part of the machinery of the Council, and visitors to County Hall may see these designations indicated on the doors of the rooms occupied by those two personages. Each Leader is entitled to attend any committee of the Council and may address it, but may not vote unless, of course, he happens to be a member of the committee. This provision, although not often used, is found to be valuable, as it enables each or both to give a lead to their followers, and

in important matters the fact that the two Leaders join in the discussion at the committee is more conducive to an understanding than might otherwise be the case.

Another interesting feature in the Council's practice is that any member, provided he has a seconder, may put forward and carry without debate a resolution asking that a committee shall consider and report upon some matter in which he is interested. This is found to be an excellent way of obtaining information and of securing consideration of some suggestion. An example of the former category was an exhaustive report on municipal theatres throughout the world, and an instance of the second use of this motion was the case of the successful exhibition at County Hall in March, 1935, of the work of the Council's Art Institutes, which occurred as the result of one of these motions put forward by myself.

The Press often misunderstands these "80 motions" (as they are called, after the number of the standing order) which appear at the end of the agenda, as the newspapers almost always inform their readers that the subjects are to be debated at the next meeting. It is expressly provided that there shall be no debate upon them until the report of the committee concerned is received.

The policy of the party in power is guided by a special committee which, in the case of the Labour Party, is termed the Policy Committee, consisting of the chairmen of the main committees and the Party Whips. All matters concerning policy are brought before this committee, which, in turn, brings those requiring a party decision before the full party. These meetings are, of course, unofficial so far as the Council is concerned. The policy of the Council in all cases of difficulty or dispute between committees is decided by the General Purposes Committee, which consists of the chairmen of committees and whips of the majority party and prominent members of the minority party, corresponding to their numerical strength on the Council. For a full description of how these various organs of the Council work the reader is referred to Herbert Morrison's book "How Greater London is Governed," published in 1935 by Lovat Dickson, price 6s.

Members of the Council receive no remuneration, and have to defray their own expenses, including travelling, even when visiting Council establishments within the county. It is only if they have to go outside the county on Council business that they are refunded travelling expenses, and they have to pay for any meals partaken of in a Council institution.

Chapter 7

MISCELLANY

The following are a few miscellaneous notes of interest which do not conveniently fall within the scope of preceding chapters, but which, nevertheless, throw some sidelights upon the Council's work :—

Amenities

It is doubtful if any member of the public is aware of all the opportunities for recreation and instruction provided by the Council. Did you, Mr. (Mrs. or Miss) London know that—

(1) By making application to the Chief Officer, L.C.C. Fire Brigade, London, S.E.1, you could obtain free admission to one of the Wednesday afternoon displays and practices, with band in attendance, of the London Fire Brigade. The new headquarters on the Albert Embankment have covered balcony accommodation for 800 spectators.

(2) You can walk in at lunch-time any day during term time, except Saturday, to the Hotel and Restaurant Technical School in the Westminster Technical Institute, Vincent Square, Westminster, and have an excellent lunch for 2s. 6d. or *à la carte* (no tips), prepared by chefs of the future and served by young waiters under training.

(3) You can visit the Horniman Museum, at London Road, Forest Hill, maintained by the L.C.C., containing a wonderful collection of mixed exhibits attractive to old and young, particular attention being paid to natural history. A charming garden, commanding fine views of London, is attached.

(4) In Kingsland Road the L.C.C. maintains the Geffrye Museum, in a picturesque building, formerly almshouses, containing a wonderful collection of furniture and interior decorations.

(5) The Council has two public Golf Courses (open all day, Sundays included), at Beckenham Place Park (30 minutes from the centre of London) and at Hainault (11 miles from Liverpool Street).

(6) Victoria Park in East London now contains the finest " Lido " in the metropolis.

(7) Any serious student of London affairs may make free use of the Council's reference library at County Hall.

(8) Individuals and parties are conducted round County Hall on Saturdays between 10.30 a.m. and noon, and on Bank Holidays between 1.30 and 3.30 p.m.

(9) In addition to the parks in your own immediate neighbourhood, there are several worth a journey for their distinctive features, *e.g.*, Golders Hill Park, Hampstead, and Brockwell Park, Herne Hill, for their delightful Old-English Gardens ; Avery Hill, Eltham, for the Palm Houses and Greenhouses, the largest in London outside of Kew Gardens ; the Rookery, Streatham Common, for its charming lay-out.

(10) You can attend the meetings of the Council at County Hall any Tuesday afternoon during the session. Proceedings begin at 2.30.

(11) Particulars of above and other London matters can be obtained from the London Information Bureau, County Hall, S.E.1. (Telephone : Waterloo 5000 ; Extension 8655.)

Breeding Mosquitos

Who would have thought that among the jobs undertaken by the L.C.C. was the deliberate breeding of mosquitos ! At its Horton Hospital for mental and nervous diseases, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, it breeds a certain type of mosquito, by means of which persons suffering from general paralysis of the insane are infected with malaria. This treatment was discovered during the War by a Viennese doctor and has been found to have remarkable effects in connection with a disease hitherto regarded as incurable. The Council receives a special subsidy from the Government for this purpose.

Houses of Historical Interest

In 1901 the Council took over from the Society of Arts the work of indicating houses in London of historical interest by means of ornamental plaques. In connection with this service it publishes a series of booklets at 3d. each that deserve to be well-known, for they give a short biography of the person thus celebrated, with special reference to his residence in London. As an example, Booklet LXII of this series gives short biographical studies of three persons whose memory has been thus honoured, namely, Sir Julius Benedict, the composer (2, Manchester Square, in the West End), Thomas Rhodes Armitage, the celebrated blind doctor (33, Cambridge Square, Paddington), and Heinrich Karl Marx, who requires no description (41, Maitland Park Road, St. Pancras). It should be added, however, that this last-named tablet is not in position now ; it was twice smashed by unknown persons, and the occupier naturally objected to his house being subject to violent attack.

Direct Labour

The traditional attitude of the Municipal Reform Party towards municipal trading led to the inclusion of a clause in the Standing Orders of the Council providing for an annual statement of works executed by direct employment of labour. These statements have shown that even under Municipal Reform administration it was found desirable to do a considerable amount of work without the intervention of contractors, and for the last year of the Municipal Reform *régime*, ended 31st March, 1934, the total cost of such works was £867,190. For the year ended 31st March, 1935, *i.e.*, under the Labour majority, this figure had grown to £1,066,797, and in a return made a few months later for the Census of Production of Great Britain, which covered a later twelve-monthly period on a somewhat different basis, the total was £1,332,183. It is interesting to note that the Council has its own dental laboratory for the manufacture and repair of dentures for people coming under its treatment.

Prizes for Gardening

The Council spends £600 a year on prizes for the best front gardens on its cottage estates, and on window-box competitions at its block dwellings.

British Ship Adoption Scheme

One hundred L.C.C. schools are affiliated to this scheme, whereby each school becomes identified with one vessel. The children exchange letters with the officers and crew, and follow each voyage minutely. The Council pays the affiliation fee of £2 per annum.

Street Names

The Council is carrying out a complete reform of street names, eliminating duplicates and separate names for unnecessarily short sections of the same thoroughfare. The problem of the numerous High Streets is being solved by putting the name of the district in front, *e.g.*, Hampstead High Street, instead of High Street, Hampstead. The affixing of street name-plates falls within the province of the Borough Councils, so that uniformity in this respect has not thus far been brought about.

Literary Institutes

The Council runs a number of day and evening institutes under the above designation. The most important is the City Literary Institute, which is at present housed in a number of

different premises (temporary headquarters : The Guild House, Eccleston Square, Westminster) pending the erection of its new headquarters in Goldsmith Street, Drury Lane. Many readers of this booklet come across cases of persons whose work brings them to London but who are without friends in the metropolis. Such people can safely be directed to the City Literary Institute, for, apart from its educational courses and lecture series (269 in number) in almost every conceivable subject related to the " humanities," it has associated with it so large a number of clubs, societies and other functions as will enable anyone who is not an absolute nitwit to find congenial society. To cite only a few of these : Dance Club, Debating Society, Film Society, Operatic Society, Chess Club, Dramatic Societies (several), French Circle, German Club, Italian Circle, League of Friendship and a " Clio " Club for students interested in the study of London, which has social gatherings and organises Saturday rambles, theatre parties, whist drives, tennis and river parties, etc. There are twelve other Literary Institutes, less comprehensive but of the same nature, covering London north and south of the Thames.

The Voice of London

The Act creating the Metropolitan Board of Works contained an excellent and far-reaching provision that if further powers were required for the purpose of any improvement or for the benefit of the people of London the Board might make application to Parliament for the passing of such a measure. Up to that time there had been no authority that could protect the interests of London against the encroachments of profit enterprise, *e.g.*, the building of railways across public commons. It was a select committee of the House of Commons which in 1861 suggested that such powers should be given, and from that time it became the practice for the central authority to examine all proposals by companies which affected London, to present petitions to Parliament to be represented before select committees, and to oppose any scheme which appeared to interfere with public property or the rights or interest of the inhabitants of London. This is one of the most important functions of the L.C.C., and every Bill presented to Parliament is examined from the point of view expressed above and reported upon to the committees concerned and the Council itself. Before preparing Bills concerning public services it is customary for Government departments to consult the Council and ask its views, and the Council itself frequently sends deputations to ministers to make representations regarding existing or

projected legislation. It has, for example, during the last year or two made repeated representations to the Home Secretary as to the necessity of giving the Council more control over fraudulent employment agencies—thus far without success. It is interesting to note that while addresses presented by the City Corporation are in the name of the *citizens* of London, the L.C.C. speaks on behalf of the *people* of London.

Supplies Department

The housekeeping side of an hotel with its hundreds of guests and staff is no small matter; the task of purchasing and arranging for the delivery of food, furniture, and general stores to a chain of hotels is still greater; but formidable as these tasks may sound they are small compared to the magnitude of the work performed by the Supplies Department of the London County Council, which in several respects ranks among the largest single consumers in the country. When figures exceed a certain sum they cease to convey anything definite to the reader. Let me attempt a different method.

I happen to be Chairman of the Committee of a Mental Hospital. This institution contains about 2,400 patients and a staff of nearly 600, making a total of roughly 3,000 people to be fed, clothed and furnished with the ordinary necessities and amenities of life. This means constant supplies of food, including fresh fruit and vegetables, fuel and clothing, not to mention furniture and other household supplies. But this is only one of the 15 institutions for mental cases, the 34,000 or so inhabitants of which have to be kept supplied. This, however, is only one, and by no means the largest, department of the Council's activities. Apart from those already mentioned, the Council has 85 general and special hospitals and convalescent homes, 19 institutions and homes for the destitute, the aged poor and children, and 20 training centres. The residential population exceeds 113,000. Add to this the requirements in the shape of furniture, equipment, stationery, etc., of the 900,000 students of all ages, and teachers, in the educational establishments maintained or aided by the Council, and some idea may be formed of the work involved in ordering, checking the quality and delivering the variety of goods and articles that have to be purchased.

Many of the Council's institutions are in the country—some of them as far away as Lowestoft, Margate and Littlehampton, and for all of these regular and fresh supplies of milk, meat and other foodstuffs and necessities have to be provided. Fifty tons of foodstuffs go in and out of the Peckham depot daily. The

number of separate premises to be supplied with fuel approaches 2,000, consuming over 500,000 tons of coal and 100,000 tons of coke per annum. The quality of all goods supplied is most carefully tested.

The Supplies Department has its own fine motor repairs depot in which its large fleet of vehicles and ambulances is repaired and maintained.

During the year ended March 31st, 1936, the Supplies Department, which has a staff of nearly 1,000, dealt with 510,000 separate invoices, and out of the enormous number of items purchased last year the following may be found of interest: 2,089,000 aspirin tablets, 1,627,000 lb. bacon (roughly the equivalent of 280 pigs a week); 8,880,000 eggs; 15,935,000 lb. potatoes; 28,000,000 pints of milk; 394,100 saveloys; 2,424,107 bundles of firewood; 249,000 cabbage plants; 33,963 dozen cups and mugs; 117,000 towels; 21,000 shrouds; 104,000 thimbles; 5,600,000 pens; 6,900 footballs.

By collective purchasing on a large scale (its purchases exceeding £4,000,000 a year), the Supplies Department does not merely buy cheaply but through the services of a staff of experts it makes sure of getting what it pays for; and a point of special significance to Socialists is that a close analysis of the cost of maintaining the patients in large hospitals reveals the fact that buying in bulk results in the food bill working out at the low figure of just over 4s. per head per week. The Council, under its Labour majority, standardized numerous fittings such as baths, boilers, ranges, sinks, wash-tubs and internal doors required on the new housing estates, and by itself purchasing them in bulk is saving the ratepayers considerable sums.

L.C.C. as Publisher

The Council, of course, publishes a vast number of official reports as well as a fortnightly L.C.C. Gazette containing official notices, particulars of situations vacant, results of tenders, etc. In addition to these, however, it also publishes works of general interest. In conjunction with the London Survey Committee it issues a series of superbly illustrated books giving an archæological and historic survey of the various London parishes, the famous annual volume entitled "London Statistics," which has the most perfect index I have ever encountered, a Guide to County Hall, and occasionally a special book such as a report by Lewis Silkin, M.P., Chairman of the Housing and Public Health Committee, being an account of Continental

Methods of Laying-out Estates and Erecting Dwellings for the Working Classes. The Council's publishing agents are P. S. King & Son, Ltd., 14, Great Smith Street, Westminster, S.W.1.

Keeping Children off the Streets

Fifty school playgrounds are kept open on summer evenings with special games leaders. Some playgrounds are flood-lit during the winter. More paddling pools and gymnasia, etc., are being provided in the parks—all with a view to keeping children off the streets.

Refugees from Spain

The L.C.C. organisation is frequently made use of by the Government. At the request of the Foreign Office the Council took charge of British refugees from Spain. Officers of the Council met them on arrival, provided accommodation and gave all necessary assistance, financial and otherwise. Of the 700 (approximately) persons thus aided, 77 were found employment through the instrumentality of the Council.

Welfare Office

On the Thames Embankment, close to Charing Cross Underground Station, is a small office known to vagrants and the homeless poor, which directs them to decent accommodation in Council or charitable institutions, and endeavours to enable them to regain independence. This office used to be open only at night time, but is now open also during the day.

London as a Tourist Centre

With a view to attracting more visitors to London the Council, towards the end of 1936, decided to contribute to the funds of the Travel Association, and has opened a London Information Bureau at County Hall to deal with inquiries. Certain extensions in this direction are under consideration. Under the auspices of the Council a largely attended course of lectures for guides and would-be guide lecturers and the employees of travel organisations, on the history, geography and developments of London, was started in the same year at the North-Western Polytechnic.

Rates and Rateable Value

Contrary to precedent and anticipations, the rateable value of the County of London at the last valuation of the County showed a decrease in the rateable value of London from £61,330,832 in 1935 to £60,517,074 in 1936. This was due largely to the number of empty premises in the City and Westminster. In

spite of this fall and also the heavy reduction, by a legal decision, in the valuation for rate purposes of railway property in London, the L.C.C. under its Labour majority has raised the rates by only 1s. 2d. in the £, *i.e.*, from 6s. 1½d. to 7s. 3½d., or by 1s. in the £ if compared with the year 1933-4, when the rate was 6s. 3½d., it having been reduced 2d. just before the March, 1934, election. This is not an excessive price to pay for the work undertaken, and leaders of the Municipal Reform Party have admitted that if given a majority it is unlikely that they could reduce the rate. The Council does not collect its rates direct from the ratepayers but makes precepts on the various borough councils for the total amount due in respect of each borough as shown by its valuation. The borough council includes this in the rate it levies for its own purposes.

Note

This booklet has been written a few weeks prior to the L.C.C. election of 4th March, 1937. It will be a fiercely contested election, and all that can be said at the moment is that if Labour is again returned it will be able still more forcefully to continue its work of creating a new and better London ; if, on the other hand, it ceases to be in a majority, the pace of progress will be slackened (to put it mildly) ; but one thing is certain, namely, that the first Labour majority on the L.C.C. has left its mark on London.

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