

Resistance notes



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May 2011

Build the resistance against all cuts!



Elected Mayor?

No thanks!

Rank any number of options in your order of preference.

- Joe Smith
- 1 John Citizen
- 3 Jane Doe
- Fred Rubble
- 2 Mary Hill

AV or not AV?



UK Uncut



Students revolt- review article

Published by Socialist Resistance, Birmingham

Ecosocialist ~ Feminist ~ Revolutionary

Resistance Notes

Resistance Notes is the latest incarnation of the Socialist Bulletin produced by *Birmingham Socialist Resistance*.

In these pages we print not only articles from our own website *birminghamresist.wordpress.com* but pieces from other groups and individual bloggers reflecting the diversity and vibrancy of the ongoing struggle against the Con-Dem cuts. In particular, we are keen to focus on the growing social movements – of women, Black people, disabled people – as well as campaigns such as *Coalition of Resistance* and *UKUncut*. We will also feature articles (not all of which we necessarily agree with) from our fellow ecosocialists in the *Green Left* tendency, with whom we have long had a fruitful collaboration, and groups such as *Counterfire* with which we work closely in the *Coalition Of Resistance*.

For in-depth analysis of the movement, we urge our readers to subscribe to our bi-monthly magazine, *Socialist Resistance* and for the best international coverage to visit the website of the *Fourth International-internationalviewpoint.org*

Resistance Notes will also be bringing out a series of cheap pamphlets on topical issues. The first of these, on the disabled peoples' movement is now available and we have one on the nuclear disaster in Japan in the pipeline.

This publication relies entirely on donations so if you value a locally based left press, please give generously!

We also welcome submissions of articles and feedback on items published. The prize for the best letter in each issue is a Che Guevara mug and coaster set!



AV– the case for

Source: <http://collectiveresistance.com/2011/04/23/av-the-case-for/#comment-575>

Across the British state people are talking of little else than the May referendum on the alternative vote (AV) system and whether or not it is preferable to the current first past the post (FPTP) method of electing neo-liberal governments. The consensus on the left favours a vote against AV. There is a dissenting view which Alan Thornett sets out in this piece from [Socialist Resistance](#) arguing that

AV is a smidgeon more democratic than the current arrangement.

The Tory-led, and heavily funded, campaign for a NO vote in the AV referendum appears to be winning the contest hands down. Cameron, with a total commitment to the corrupt FPTP system, is whipping Tory voters (in particular) into line with a series of dire predictions and downright lies about the consequences of AV which bear no factual relationship to the issues at hand.

They are wiping the floor with the lack-lustre, under-organised, and gimmick-ridden campaign for a YES vote led by the Labour leadership and the Lib Dems. Whilst Lib Dems are strongly behind a YES vote Labour are divided on it from top to bottom. Much of the Labour Left is also for a NO vote.

Unfortunately most of the far left are also supporting the NO campaign. Yet if the NO campaign wins it will be seen as a thumping endorsement of the current FPTP system which delivered outrageously undemocratic election results throughout the 20th century in defence of the two party system and which, in the event of a NO vote, will be set to continue doing so for the foreseeable future – and with a referendum decision behind it.

Under FPTP in the last election the Tories won just 36% of the vote which gave them a much higher proportion of MPs. In 2005 Labour polled just 35.2% of the votes cast but for this they got 55.1% of the seats in Parliament – way above their proportional entitlement. The Tories polled 30.7% of the vote and 32.3% of the seats – just above their proportional entitlement. The Lib Dems polled 22.1% of the vote and all they got for this was just 9.6% of seats – less than half of their proportional entitlement.

This meant that it took 26000 votes to elect a Labour MP, 44000 to elect a Tory MP, and a huge 96000 to elect a Liberal Democrat MP – nearly four times as many votes as those needed by a Labour MP. Such a system is scandalous and indefensible even before you consider the way it stacks the odds against small parties.

It also meant that around 70% of voters cast votes which make no difference what-so-ever to the outcome since they were in safe seats of one kind or another and the election is won or lost in a minority of marginal seats.

The latest far left organisation to adopt a NO vote stance is the SWP – see SW of April 16. In doing so they have recycled some of the most vacuous justifications.

The first is that a NO vote will “deepen the rifts in the coalition”. This is not only the wrong approach but it is problematic as a prediction. Whichever way the vote goes it will cause a crisis in the coalition. Whilst a NO vote would precipitate a crisis for the Lib Dems a YES vote would be totally unacceptable to a swathe of mind-dead Tory MPs, who see FPTP as akin to a religion, and who would blame Cameron for getting them into it.

The issue of AV, however, should not be judged on the conjunctural effect of the referendum on the establishment parties but whether it is an improvement (even a very small one as in this case) over the existing system and/or does it have the propensity to open the door to further reform towards a proportionate system which would deliver fair votes: i.e. a Parliament where the number of MPs for each party directly reflect the votes polled by each party?

A vote for change would show that change was possible and pose the issue of further change, particularly since the most of those supporting it would want to go further, while a vote for FPTP would retrench the existing system

The second argument SW advances is that voting in bourgeois elections is not that important anyway. “Having a vote is better than not having a vote” SW argues and goes on, “The capitalist class can live with political democracy—the election of parliaments and governments—because the decisive levers of power are outside parliament.”

This seriously misunderstands the importance of the electoral field to the class struggle under capitalism and understates the right of the working class to democracy under a bourgeois-democratic system. Bourgeois democracy is not workers democracy of course but the struggle for a democratic voting system under capitalism is a part of the struggle for socialism. It also downplays the struggles historically for the universal franchise (the Chartists and the women’s suffrage movement) — which were about democracy under a bourgeois system.

In Britain in the 20th century there were periods which were effectively elected dictatorships based on huge majorities in Parliament, yet these majorities bore little relationship to the support the parties enjoyed amongst the electorate. It is not in the interests of working class for such a system to continue.

AV of course will not resolve that because it is not a proportional system but a vote of confidence in FPTP will not resolve it either. It could set back change for another generation.

The SW article argues that AV will not strengthen the left — but this is not true. It would at least allow voters to express their genuine preferences without the pressure to vote tactically and allows small parties to stand without fear of splitting the vote. It therefore benefits small parties as against FPTP at the constituency level. This does not mean it would be easier for small parties to get into Westminster, only PR can do that, but it would at least give small parties a more representative vote at constituency level which would increase their credibility in elections.

It would ensure that all MPs are elected on the basis of majority support (at present only a third of them achieve this and would undermine, least to some extent, the safe seats which FPTP provides for Labour and the Tories which disenfranchises swathes of voters at every election.

SW argues that: “Many European countries have more progressive voting systems than in Britain. Portugal has PR—but workers still face savage cuts.” Of course no one is arguing that the voting system can replace the class struggle. But it should be remembered that the left is strongly represented in the Portuguese parliament, including the far left, and that would not be the case under FPTP.

The SW article even uses the London mayoral election as a negative example of AV, arguing that it was still a contest between the two main parties. This may be true, given the electoral relationship of forces, but it at least allowed the voters to vote both for their preferred candidate as well as voting against the worst main contender — which in this case was the Tories. FPTP would be far worse for the London mayoral elections.

The far left needs to think again on this issue.

No to an elected Mayor for Birmingham!

Source: <http://birminghamresist.wordpress.com/2011/04/26/no-to-an-elected-mayor-for-birmingham/>

by Richard Hatcher

Birmingham 2013: The Conservative Elected Mayor
Labour took control of the council in 2012. But the mayor is Tory Mike Whitby, elected in 2013 after the referendum in May 2012 voted for elected mayors, as proposed by the Coalition government. Whitby had been acting as ‘shadow’ elected mayor – he was actually imposed by the government – since 2011. He has just announced that he will also be taking over the job of chief executive of the authority, replacing Stephen Hughes. He has also announced his Cabinet.

Six members (though the minimum allowed is just three): two other leading Tories, and three local business leaders. The mayor can appoint who he likes to the Cabinet – they don’t even have to be councillors. No Lib-Dems – he doesn’t need a coalition. His term of office is four years. During that time he holds all the reins of council power, responsible for, among other things, transport, policing and economic development. He has the power to hire and fire chief officers, a sanction previously in the hands of a committee of senior councillors. He cannot be unseated by a vote of council members. The Council would only be able to overturn a proposal put forward by the mayor if at least two-thirds voted against. The role of the councillors, of all parties, is reduced to that of ‘scrutiny’ and ward casework.

The three business leaders on the Cabinet are also closely connected to the Local Enterprise Partnership, which stretches across the W Mids from Lichfield to Redditch. The LEP got government approval for the ‘enterprise zone’ which now covers most of central Birmingham. It claimed it would create 50,000 jobs and raise £700million from increased business rates from new and expanded companies over a 25 year period, which would be attracted by a 100% discount on business rates for 5 years, up to total of £275,000 and relaxed planning restrictions. Power in the city now lies in the hands of a partnership between the elected mayor and his appointed cabinet on the one hand and the leaders of the business community, including those heading up the ‘enterprise zone’, on the other. Birmingham is governed by a corporate urban regime.

Those sections of big business which contract for local government services have made no secret of their support for the mayoral system. One of the biggest contractors for local government services, Capita, stated in evidence to a House of Lords committee that they like the idea of “a strong leader who can personally commit the council making it easier for firms like theirs to develop partnerships”. In other words, dealing with a single business-oriented politician who can act without reference to anyone else makes it much easier for firms like Capita to win contracts for local government services.

Birmingham 2013: What happened to Labour’s campaign for elected mayor?

The would-be candidates initially were Sion Simon, former MP for Erdington, and Albert Bore. Simon was always the front runner, backed by Labour's National Executive, which sidelined Albert Bore. Already in 2011 Paul Dale, the Birmingham Post columnist, was reporting about Simon that

He's been holding a series of meet-Sion soirees, where Labour supporters, those with no political affiliation, and local business leaders get the chance to have a drink with the would-be mayor and find out where he stands on the major issues of the day. MP's trade union leaders and constituency Labour parties are being lined up to support him. All in all, his bandwagon is beginning to roll and you have to imagine it will become increasingly difficult to stop Sion Simon from getting the Labour mayoral nomination.

Simon's campaign was not dissimilar to Whitby's in focusing on a partnership with business leaders. Simon said in 2011 he wanted to "almost reclaim Birmingham from divisive party politics", and promised that his cabinet would be a "very inclusive coalition that has to include the business sector". He proposed in a speech to the Chamber of Commerce in 2011 that he could appoint private sector advisors with delegated powers to take executive decisions.

Birmingham 2011

The campaign for a yes vote in the 2012 referendum for an elected mayor has already started behind the scenes. The left needs to be clear that elected mayors represent a further devastating blow to what remains of local democracy. Whitby is in fact opposed to elected mayors, though he might still stand. Alternatively there may be a move to put in place a supposedly 'independent' candidate above party politics, perhaps from the world of business. And of course Labour might well win, riding the wave of anti-Coalition sentiment, though on a 'non-party' pro-business ticket.

The attraction of an elected mayor for many people, cynical about bureaucratic local government and unresponsive party politics, is that there would be a highly visible single individual who could apparently 'get things done'. That's Cameron's argument. It can only be effectively opposed, not only by pointing out the dangers of elected mayors, but by putting forward an alternative conception of local government based on radical participatory democracy, in which ordinary people can feel that they can influence local political decision-making. It's a debate the left needs to open up.



SR Forum- The new war in the Middle East

Source: <http://birminghamresist.wordpress.com/2011/04/21/sr-forum-the-new-war-in-the-middle-east/>

Speakers

Fred Leplat, Stop the War Coalition and Socialist Resistance

Dr Sami Ahmed, Midlands Egyptian Society

Tuesday 17th May, 7.30pm

'Bennett's', Bennetts Hill,

Birmingham City Centre,

B2 5RS

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt constitute a historic turning point in the international situation. These revolutions change the rules of the game. They are the first revolutions of this 21st century resulting from the crisis of the world capitalist system.

They have exploded in the weak links of capitalist globalisation. They concern a double process, one of rejection of the dictatorships but also a social one. Millions of people can no longer stand the explosion of prices of basic food products and which gives only unemployment and misery as a prospect to millions of young people.

These are revolutions because there has been an eruption of the mass movement on the social and political scene and they open crisis of the regime. They combine democratic, social and national questions. These revolutions are sending a shock waves throughout the North of Africa and the Middle East as they are the first stage of a battle against the dictatorships. It is a confrontation between forces which seeks to ensure the continuity of the power of the dominant classes and those which aspires to democracy and the satisfaction of the basic social needs of the popular classes.

In Libya, socialists must both express their unconditional solidarity with the people of Libya in its uprising against the Gaddafi dictatorship and call for opposition to the NATO/UN military intervention. The rebels should receive immediately all the necessary humanitarian and military aid for their struggle, without strings and under their direct control. The intervention by the imperialist powers is designed to take advantage of the situation following the disaster of the Iraq occupation, and they will put their own interests above those of the Libyan people. A defeat for the Libyan revolution would be a defeat for the whole unfolding revolutions in the Middle East.



A Major Win for UK Uncut

Source: <http://www.ukuncut.org.uk/blog/a-major-win-for-uk-uncut>

Amidst all the news reports bouncing back and forth right now about mass arrests and political policing, it's sometimes easy to lose sight of what we're fighting for, and how far we've come as a group. Today saw the launch of a public inquiry, to be conducted by the Treasury select committee, into the issue of corporate tax avoidance.

An issue which, six months ago, didn't even figure on the political map for many, is now taking centre stage and, one way or another, this Government will be forced to listen. What is more, the executives of some of the worst offenders – hopefully Barclays, Vodafone and Boots amongst them – will be called to answer questions before the committee about their “tax efficiency” practices. With a bit of luck, Sir Philip Green might even have to explain to his former employers why he felt that the £250m he dodged would be better spent on his lifestyle rather than schools and hospitals for the people who buy his products.

The coalition has already been put on the back foot over tax avoidance, thanks in a large part to the hard work and dedication of UK Uncutters up and down the country. The Government mentioned several new anti tax-avoidance measures in last weeks budget, and is even discussing a blanket anti-avoidance law, similar to the one in Australia. This inquiry will ramp up the pressure on Ministers to introduce such a bill sooner rather than later.

Occasionally people ask us what we've achieved and what we hope to achieve at UK Uncut. When they do, we think not only of the empowering, inspiring, creative direct actions we've taken, of the networks of friends and activists we've forged, or of the debate we've lit about the genuine alternatives to these unnecessary cuts. We also think of hard won political victories like the one we've seen today, victories which will, slowly but surely, bring about real political change.

Why I Marched, Why I Occupied

Source: <http://www.ukuncut.org.uk/blog/guest-post-why-i-marched-why-i-occupied>

by Adam Ramsay. Read more at Bright Green Scotland.

I spent the best part of the weekend in a police cell in Illford. I've been accused of taking part in a peaceful protest at Fortnum & Mason's, and charged with aggravated trespass. But being locked up for a day is nothing, nothing to the fate of those who will be hardest hit by the government's cuts and privatisation.

While out promoting the march a few weeks ago, a friend and I met two such people. Both of these people are severely physically disabled. They cannot leave their homes without help. They have a carer who comes, twice a week, and takes them in her car for a trip into town, where they do their shopping, and maybe see a friend.

But the money that pays for the carer's petrol is being withdrawn by George Osborne. She can no longer afford to take the people we met into town - can't afford to help them get out of the house. And so both expect to be left imprisoned in their own homes for much of the rest of their lives.

Or let's look at Martha. Martha is a multiply disabled woman from Oxfordshire. She lives in a care home - has lived there for most of her life. That's where her friends are, she knows her carers there. It's her home. Sometimes, she is pushed in her wheelchair around the garden, and she likes this. Her Dad, William, can tell she likes it, because she calms down. She's not been calm very often lately, because she can tell what's happening to her. She may not know the details - that the government is launching a radical economic experiment: mass privatisation and the biggest spending cuts in a western country since those that prolonged the Great Depression. She probably doesn't know that that George Osborne announced massive cuts to the support she needs by telling us that anyone who thinks these cuts are solely about saving money is "missing the point" - that the credit crunch is a "once in a generation opportunity" to change the services she relies on. Martha doesn't know what these cuts are about. She hasn't come across phrases like: "shock doctrine". She's never heard of Fred Goodwin or derivatives, or sub-prime mortgages.

But she can tell that she is going to be kicked out of her home. The cuts to the Disability Living Allowance mean that she can no longer afford to stay there - her parents can't afford to subsidise her place. She will be forced into a much cheaper home. One where she won't be with her friends - friends she may never get to see again. Her trips outside will be much rarer. She will be left lonely and alone, with a rapid turnover of carers she can never get to know. And so she will be too will be imprisoned locked up in an institution she hasn't chosen, trapped by cuts and by a government who thinks that she can't fight back.

Or let's look at my friend John. John is exceptionally talented - as many people are. He works hard and he is diligent and he is passionate. But as a member of the jilted generation, he has been left unemployed. He has been thrown onto George Osborne's scrapheap of the 'undeserving': poor people, disabled people, young people. His plight is the plight of my generation - a fate spelled out in unemployment stats and on a million rems of recycled job applications and a million fading dreams. After months spent searching for work that isn't there, days carefully filling in forms and updating CVs that end up in the trash, John gets depressed. Nothing knocks his confidence like unemployment. The evidence tells us that joblessness kills. It causes stress, it breaks down communities. And this too leaves people imprisoned - trapped by their own self doubt and self loathing and depression.

In the recent stories about Mark Stone - the police officer who infiltrated the climate movement - we saw the lengths to which the police are willing to go to gain intelligence on peaceful protesters, and to attempt to intimidate us out of activism. And that may be what they are trying to do here. But it won't work. It won't work because we know that protesting does work - we remember that every intitution of organised justice in this country had to be fought for. It won't work because people are beginning to see that these cuts have nothing to do with fixing the economy and everything to do with right wing ideology. And it won't work because a day in the police cells is nothing compared to a lifetime trapped as a prisoner in your own home. It is nothing to what they are doing to Martha, and what they are doing to John. It is nothing compared to the damage that these cuts will do to our communities and our friends and our lives.

From public services to market services

Source: <http://birminghamresist.wordpress.com/2011/04/21/from-public-services-to-market-services/>

Richard Hatcher looks at the forthcoming government white paper.

In the next few weeks the government is publishing a new White Paper on public services. In February David Cameron wrote an article in the Sunday Telegraph signalling its purpose.

'We will create a new presumption – backed up by new rights for public service users and a new system of independent adjudication – that public services should be open to a range of providers competing to offer a better service. [...] This is a transformation: instead of having to justify why it makes sense to introduce competition in some public services – as we are now doing with schools and in the NHS – the state will have to justify why it should ever operate a monopoly.' (S. Tel. 20 February)

In other words, the whole of the public sector, apart from a few exceptions – Cameron cites the judiciary and 'national security' – will be available for privatisation. The thinking behind this is spelled out in a report called *How to shift power from Whitehall to public service customers* published last year by three senior partners at KPMG.¹ In February this year, the same month as his Sunday Telegraph article was published, David Cameron appointed one of the authors, Paul Kirby, as the government's head of policy development.

The KPMG report draws a negative balance-sheet of Labour's reforms. 'Public service reform has not been radical – the underlying structure and culture of public service professions, institutions and management has not been fundamentally challenged.' (p1). The fundamental issue now is not cuts, it is privatisation.

'The presenting issue is about levels of spending, but the real issues are about shifting control from providers to their customers and from bureaucrats to enterprising professionals. This is the only way we can enable people get what they need from public services, albeit for less.' (p1).

Marketisation hasn't gone nearly far enough, because there isn't enough competition.

'Recent UK reform has tried to 'marketise' much of the public sector – creating buyers and sellers, transacting around defined services for annual funding. This includes: competition in the health service; money following the pupil, student and patient; a mixed economy of providers in social care; competitive tendering in blue collar and support services; transfers of social housing to new landlords; creation of executive agencies in the Civil Service; £10bn of services bought from the third sector; creation of PFI and other asset based PPPs. But these reforms have a more limited impact than many hoped (and some feared). The reality is that the ongoing income of the majority of providers has been guaranteed, even if their status has changed (to foundation trust, academy, RSL, outsourced care service, etc).

Public sector funding is far too sticky – once providers have funding, in reality they tend to keep it and have it increased every year.' (p5).

The solution is almost total freedom for providers and payment by results (PBR).

(ii) Payment by results should be implemented across the public sector without exception – where it exists already, it should be made more forceful and sophisticated, where it does not exist, it should be introduced with very limited transitional periods.

(iii) Public service providers (whether public, private or voluntary sector) should be given almost total freedom to respond effectively to their customers and the PBR regime... (p1).

The government's job is to rapidly construct this new free market in 'public' services. This requires new demand-side consumer control of funding, and new supply-side rights for providers.

On the demand side, services are divided into 'personal services' and 'local services'. 'Personal services' include:

- Education – early years, schools, FE & skills, higher education and SEN.
- Health and adult social care – primary care, elective secondary care, dentistry, adult social care.' (p12)

They would be funded through a voucher system.

'In personal services, the funding [c. £200bn or over half of public services funding] should be in the hands of individual consumers, in education, health, and adult care. Money should follow the choices made by parents, patients, students and those receiving care.' (p11)

The government would kick-start the market with

'The use of a tariff to determine, as simply as possible, how much funding should be given to a customer to spend on their entitlement and to set the going price for providers. The tariff, e.g. X thousand per pupil, should include all the funding available, including any premiums for additional needs and any capital funding' (p3).

'For local services, the funding (c. £50bn or 15% of public services funding) should be unequivocally given to local communities to decide without any strings from Whitehall. Elected local people should be able to shape real local priorities and to pursue innovation in the services, accountable to local communities not Whitehall. This will include community safety, local environment, leisure, social housing and children services. (p11)

'Accountable to local communities' does not necessarily mean 'accountable to local elected government'. On the contrary, the aim, as in the Localism Bill, is in many cases to replace local government with other types of community bodies, not necessarily elected, and not accountable to local councils.

To construct the supply-side, 'There will have to be an aggressive programme of liberalization to give public service providers the incentives and freedom to respond.' (p18). This would require new rules, including:

- A right to bid – where any public service provider (from any sector) can make a proposal to take on a service from another organisation
- A right to own – where staff and managers are able to propose a staff and/or management buy-out or mutualisation of their service, with or without external investors and joint venture partners

- A right to merge and acquire – where successful public service providers (from whichever sector) can propose mergers, demergers, acquisitions or disposals

- A right to manage – where public sector organisations are free to decide on resources issues (e.g. capital spending, workforce issues, IT, multi-year surpluses and deficits, etc).’ (p18)

In practice this would mean:

- Empowering all public service staff and managers to launch management and/or staff buy-outs of their services, whether that is whole organisations or parts of them – creating a whole new raft of enterprising public service providers;

- Inviting local authorities, social enterprises and enterprising public sector professionals to bid to take over any centrally controlled locally delivered services (e.g offender management, welfare to work, mental health, etc) as ‘new agents’.

- Freedom for providers to choose their own delivery processes, so long as they achieve the outputs or outcomes required of them.

- Freedom for external investors and suppliers (both not-for-profit and for-profit) to propose taking stakes in public service delivery, whether through taking equity stakes, insourcing expertise, etc.

- Financial flexibility through less ring-fencing, relaxing capital / revenue rules and having a permanent and predictable regime of end-of-year carry-forwards.

- Devolved decisions on resources (e.g. pay structures and levels, IT, property usage, improvement budgets, etc).’ (p19)

A variety of types of providers and organisational forms are envisaged, not just private companies, though they are likely to be by far the main beneficiaries, but the logic of the untrammelled market is that all providers will be forced to act like for-profit private companies.

‘It also goes beyond the freedom to operate – into the freedom for staff and managers to own their organization, either on their own or jointly with the community they serve or with external investors. There are a wide variety of options (mutuals, employee co-operatives, joint ventures, management buy-outs, etc) but they all focus staff on their ongoing need to meet customer requirements to stay in business.’ (p19)

Finally, providers cannot be relied on to enter this new market voluntarily – they may have to be compelled.

‘Such a set of rights will need to be actively promoted and supported by Government and (counter-intuitively) empowerment will need to be forced onto public sector organisations in the early stages to break the tendency to structural inertia. History shows that just offering the freedom is not enough – e.g. the Government is still trying to persuade schools to take the freedoms as academies that they could have taken 20 years ago as grant maintained schools.’(p18).

The KPMG report’s programme represents the complete marketisation and privatisation of public services. To what extent will it be embodied in the new White Paper? On the one hand it is a huge risk for government in terms both of

whether it would actually work and the likely opposition and resistance it would arouse. On the other hand, the Coalition parties know that the lesson of ‘shock doctrine’ and of the half-way Blair reforms is that you have to strike fast and hard if radical market reform is to be driven through to completion and the old public service system so completely demolished that it cannot be put back together again. If the White Paper incorporates much of what the KPMG report proposes it will represent a marketised transformation of public services without precedent, and the biggest challenge yet to its opponents.

Richard Hatcher

Reference

1. Alan Downey, Paul Kirby, and Neil Sherlock (2010) How to shift power from Whitehall to public service customers, London: KPMG. Online at <http://www.kpmg.co.uk/pubs/204000%20Payment%20For%20Success%20Access.pdf>



Labour and ConDems run away from debate on public services in Brighton

Source: <http://hoverepublic.blogspot.com/2011/04/labour-and-condems-run-away-from-debate.html>

The Public and Commercial Services Union in Brighton has called off an organised 'hustings' for candidates at the local elections as Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have all declined invitations to attend. The debate was due to take place on Thursday at the Friends meeting house in Ship Street

PCS has run a successful campaign over a number of years called 'Make your vote count' which encourages people to use their vote in elections, to support public services and to oppose the far right. However, in Brighton only the Green Party and the Trade union and Socialist Candidate were prepared to face the electorate and public sector workers. Both also have supported the Unions pledges in supporting public services.

Kevin Dale, Make your Vote Count Co-ordinator in Brighton said " We organised the hustings, as we have up and down the country , because we believe voters are entitled to hear what politicians think and we also felt it was an opportunity for parties to say what they stand for. All credit to TUSC and the Greens for being prepared to speak up for what they believe in but it seems Labour, the Lib Dems and Tories are running scared of the people they want to represent. Labour and the Lib Dems both declined invitations to attend and attempts to get a Conservative speaker also came to nothing.

What are these parties scared of? Are their policies not up to scrutiny?

We have taken the decision not to go ahead with the meeting due mainly to the failure of Labour to debate issues particularly the cuts and public services, and we ask voters to support candidates in Brighton who have publicly backed our campaign and signed the our unions 5 Pledges to support public services, those being TUSC and the Greens."

Jason KitKat, Green party Councillor, who was due to speak said "I am disappointed that the other parties are not up for open and fair debate around the issues that effect the electorate. The Greens are willing to debate with any party as there are issues that need to be addressed."

Phil Clarke of the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition which is standing against all cuts said " The cuts in council services are so severe that councillors need to make them central to this election.

Refusing to even debate the issues shows how weak labours anti-cuts credentials are. The people of Brighton need to look elsewhere at Trade unionists and Socialist against the cuts candidates to find people who have pledged to take on the government and vote against all cuts."

A-star anti-cuts day school unites South East activists

Source: <http://brightontradescouncil.blogspot.com/2011/04/star-anti-cuts-day-school-unites-south.html>



Bright sunshine shone a light on the anti-cuts movement in Brighton on Saturday as campaigners from across the region came together to share and discuss ideas to defend jobs and public services across Sussex and beyond.

Over 80 people took part in the South East Day School event hosted by Brighton Stop the Cuts Coalition , with anti-cuts activists from London, Redhill, Lewes, Brighton, Worthing, Eastbourne and Horsham all represented.

A variety of sessions saw a wide range of informative debates on defending the NHS, welfare services and education, along

with UK Uncut workshops and anti-privatisation and anti-academy campaigning, all with plans to put into action.

An outside afternoon session explaining the economics of the cuts was introduced by lecturer/journalist and former Green Party principle speaker Derek Wall with an intelligent analysis on the contradictions of the capitalist system broken down into basic points on the real causes of the crisis. One contribution from a visitor stated simply that "it all boils down to working people not being given the full value of the wealth they produce."

Labour Party and Trade Unionists and Socialists Against Cuts candidates in the upcoming May elections went head-to-head in a debate about fighting job losses and privatisation in the council chamber and parliament, with many of those who joined in the discussion critical of Labour's "not anti-cuts" position and agreed on the need to build a new, independent political working class voice.

RMT president Alex Gordon and the Brighton and Hove TUC Unemployed Workers Centre's Tony Greenstein rallied those in Mandela Hall at the University of Sussex venue in the final plenary with a fighting strategy of uniting communities and campaigns in preparation for an all out public sector general strike.

Alex said: "This fight can't be won without co-ordinated industrial action by the trade union movement. But it is vital that it is linked up to stop the cuts campaigns and working class communities if we're to defend our schools, health and public services for our children and future generations."

In the final discussion Brighton, Hove and District Trades Union Council president Holly Smith proposed setting up a region-wide committee to continue sharing ideas and to help co-ordinate the anti-cuts fight back across the South East - a motion that was unanimously agreed.

Get in touch with us at brightontradescouncil@gmail.com for more info.

Disabling Lives

Source: <http://birminghamresist.wordpress.com/2011/04/04/disabling-lives/>

Bob Williams-Findlay, Disabled Socialist and Civil Rights campaigner, outlines how the Government's attack on public expenditure and the Welfare State increases the social oppression of disabled people.

Slash and burn

Earlier this year I addressed the Birmingham Against The Cuts Rally as a co-founder of the newly formed Disabled People Against Cuts(DPAC). We set it up to develop resistance, support, visibility and action against the financial assault on disabled people imposed by the Coalition's spending cuts. October 2010 saw the first mass protest against the austerity cuts outside the Tory conference. It was led by disabled people under the name of The Disabled Peoples' Protest. DPAC co-founders are the original Disabled Peoples' Protest organisers.

We returned to Birmingham because the City has experienced six years of a Coalition regime which has faithfully placed the interests of capital over the needs of disabled and non-disabled citizens. It has announced the most savage mauling of public services ever seen with £212m slashed from its annual budget at the expense of 2,450 jobs. As a former Planning Officer in the Social Services Department I'm aware of the fact that most of the services I was responsible for have gone and so too have services in the Third Sector where cuts between 20% and 60% have been experienced.

Disabled people in Birmingham, like the rest of the UK, are facing a situation where instead of having our human rights enhanced through the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons we are undergoing a wholesale attack on our living conditions by the coalition government. Instead of developing schemes which would give disabled people control over their lives via independent living, we are witnessing disabled people being imprisoned in their own homes or facing the prospect of being forced against their will into residential care. The Tories complain about giving convicted prisoners the vote but have no qualms about imprisoning people with impairments who are considered "a burden on society" – in other words being unproductive and a barrier to increased profits is seen as a crime!

Disabled people under attack

The attacks on disabled people are widespread. It began under New Labour as former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions James Purnell, backed by the Tory Press, used propaganda not unlike that employed by the Nazis to brand disabled people as lazy, fraudsters or 'not really "disabled" at all'. The Con Dem welfare reform programme sees no less than fourteen separate attacks on the benefits needed by people who are either sick or unable to work due to either impairment related issues or disabling barriers within the labour market.

Thousands of pounds is being wasted however by paying a company called Atos to assess "people fit for work". Recently, the Daily Mail complained that too many of Atos' decisions were being overturned on appeal. One person found 'fit for work' died from his illness only weeks after an Atos verdict. This is happening because the Department of Work and Pensions want to impose 'the sick role' on only a certain number of disabled people in order to paint others as 'economically active' because it suits the Government's needs. It's an age old ploy of creating two groups – 'the deserving' and 'the undeserving' poor.

The Government is throwing thousands of sick and disabled people off benefits into a labour market when they know full well employment discrimination is rife, they have slashed and burnt the Access 2 Work programme which supports disabled people into or at work, and that it is impossible for the majority of disabled people to up sticks and look for work. The attack upon disabled people should not be viewed in isolation however because it is very much part of the wider political and social agenda. The needs of Capital require the dismantling of the Welfare State and this in turn requires an ideological shift in the ways in which disabled people are both seen and treated.

Fighting cuts as part of the struggle against Disablism

Many people are now familiar with the causes of inequality within capitalist societies, where issues relating

to racism, sexism and homophobia, have been documented. Unfortunately, even within the Left, the issue of disablism is largely absent or not recognised from the perspective of disabled people. Since the late 1960s disabled people have challenged the dominant ideologies associated with defining "disability". Rather than accepting "disability" as a 'individual personal tragedy' caused by the inability to fulfil the expected roles – defined by "normality" and articulated through the measurement of loss of bodily functioning – disabled people argue they have social restrictions imposed on top of their impairments by the structures, systems and environments of specific societies. Within Capitalist Western societies the 'medicalisation' of people with impairments' lives has assisted in creating the conditions whereby they live disabled lives – excluded from or marginalised within mainstream social activities.

Disability therefore is a political issue; it is a form of social oppression. The paradox is that the manner in which disabled people 'are taken into account' – the negative stereotyping as 'abnormal', 'victims', 'burdens' or 'vulnerable' – ultimately leads to them 'not being taken into account'. It is the nature of the capitalist system – created disabling barriers – not the the nature of an individual's bodily restrictions that causes disablism. It is not our bodies that make us 'vulnerable', it is the ideological policies of this Government and the hatred being stirred up by the mass media. Together they have been responsible for the surge in disability hate crime disabled people are experiencing.

For forty years disabled people have fought for their civil and human rights as a means of combating the disabling barriers found within society. Just when we were establishing user-led organisations to challenge and change the outdated public and third sector 'dependency model' approach to service delivery; the greed of the capitalist classes and the dehumanising economic system they rely on has started to kick us back to square one. Some disabled people are living in dread of what might be, others feel so battered they are considering ending their lives. Thankfully, there are pockets of resistance among disabled people, such as those campaigning with DPAC, who are not prepared to go down without a fight. We see the fight against the cuts as being part of the struggle against disablism; our right to challenge the oppressive nature of both the state and society.



The Hardest Hit March

Source: <http://thecabbagesandkings.blogspot.com/2011/04/hardest-hit-march-fight-cuts-to.html>

The **Hardest Hit March**, which is for disabled people and supporters to fight the cuts to disability benefits is on May 11th. Last week disabled protesters brought the offices of the Daily Mail to a halt by protesting about the way that right wing rag labels disabled people and those on benefits.

The attacks on disabled people, which can easily create the scapegoating climate for hate crimes - and there have been many examples in recent years of disabled people being attacked and killed - must be resisted.

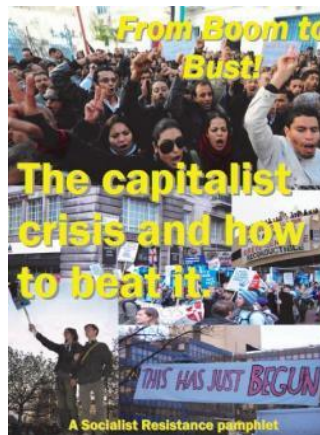
This government, and it must be said supported by many right wing Labour MPs who supported the Welfare Reform Act, is determined to grind disabled people into the dust, to force them into slave labour, on compulsory work schemes with wage rates lower than those of the minimum wage, or to starve. We have already seen recently the scandal, finally admitted by the DWP itself, of staff being told to knock claimants off benefits for minor infractions or none, and many of those people were those with learning difficulties or mental health problems. Now the grasping fingers of ATOS Medical Services and A4E will be let loose on thousands of isolated and vulnerable disabled people, not all of whom will be articulate enough to appeal, especially when so many advice agencies have closed down and free legal aid is effectively abolished.

The government has been clear that they expect at least 20% of those on Disability Living Allowance to lose it. The ruthlessness of the government and its advisors is extraordinary. DLA is a benefit which is given not to those who are unable to work (20% of those on DLA work) but in order for disabled people to live a full life, to be able to access the workplace and to be a full member of society and live a decent life. And even for the 80% of DLA claimants who do not work and many of whom cannot work, where exactly are these jobs to come from? There is already clear evidence in the stats that employers are deeply unwilling to employ disabled people - the numbers of disabled people in employment demonstrate this - or to make the necessary adjustments to make the workplace disabled friendly. Instead these people will be deprived of vital support, creating a great deal of stress and hardship at home, and forced into employment schemes run by dodgy private companies, who are being paid a whopping great fee for putting them on these schemes in the first place.

It is a return to the Victorian Poor Law for disabled people - further evidence of this government's determination to pauperise disabled people. If Dickens were still writing he would describe it for what it is - the oppressive spirit of the workhouse and parish beadle. I will be marching on May 11th, and I hope that anyone with a shred of social conscience and awareness will do likewise. This must be stopped in its tracks!

New Pamphlet: "Boom to Bust" explains how to fight crisis

Source: <http://socialistresistance.org/1919/new-pamphlet-boom-to-bust-explains-how-to-fight-crisis>



This 64 page pamphlet from Socialist Resistance contains a detailed analysis of the economic crisis and offers an alternative ecosocialist action plan to beat it.

Don't swallow Lansley's pre-election pause

Source: <http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/content/view/full/103860>

Don't believe the headlines about a pause or a so-called "listening exercise." Cameron and Lansley are forging ahead with their plans to break up the NHS into a competitive market, and to slice off a growing share of the NHS budget for private providers.

The pause in the process is designed to give Lib Dems long enough to see their party massacred in the local elections and scare them into agreeing to support Lansley's Health Bill for fear that they trigger the collapse of the coalition.

To front up the so-called "listening" exercise, an NHS Future Forum has been set up. It is stuffed with high-profile supporters of Lansley's plans. All five of the GPs on the panel are among the minority of GPs who signed up for Lansley's suggested commissioning consortiums. The whole forum is under the chairmanship of Professor Steve Field, who controversially supported Lansley's white paper back in July and has since been replaced as president of the Royal College of GPs by Dr Clare Gerada, who has criticised much of the Lansley plan.

The forum on "choice and competition" will be led by Sir Stephen Bubb, a one-time Labour councillor and now at the head the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations.

Bubb is a vigorous advocate of competition and greater private-sector involvement in delivering healthcare. He led a challenge to Labour's attempts to designate the NHS as preferred provider of community health services.

Other doctors, trust bosses, primary care trust and strategic health authority bosses and senior council officers among the 40 hand-picked appointees on the forum are likely to be influenced by their career aspirations. They are unlikely to listen to any articulate critics of the Lansley plan.

The whole process has been set up to waste a month, to give the impression of responding to public opinion - and then to press through the key elements of the plan with little if any actual change.

There is no indication that the principal objections raised at the Lib Dem conference a few weeks ago have been taken on board by the Tories, not least because the suggestion that the private sector can somehow be prevented from "cherry-picking" the most profitable services from the NHS is pure fantasy.

Cherry-picking is central to the private provision of healthcare. Even the so-called "non-profit" social enterprises will have to focus on delivering a surplus from their work and will be compelled in a competitive market to withdraw from services which cannot guarantee to deliver them a surplus.

The only guarantee against the private sector cherry-picking services and destabilising existing NHS provision in many parts of the country is to drop Lansley's plans altogether and to focus resources on investing in NHS care related to local need.

That's why it's vital that Labour and the unions crank up the pressure to force the Con-Dems to ditch the Bill.

The price of cuts

The new financial year is already starting to reveal an even bigger round of damaging cuts in services across the NHS, with thousands more jobs facing the axe, many of them front-line staff, while remaining staff will also be hit by cuts in admin and management that will dump more tasks upon them.

Among the really massive cuts are a proposed 20 per cent cut in the workforce of the London Ambulance Service, most of them front-line staff without whom emergency services will be put at risk.

Another cut which the media has strangely failed to report is the plan to halve staff numbers in community mental health in east London, putting vital services at risk. Despite being dressed up as efficiency savings, virtually all of the job cuts are nurses and other front-line clinical staff.

The government now admits that at least 22 trusts with major PFI commitments are threatened with major financial problems as the tariff paid for delivering NHS treatment is reduced, new restrictions are placed on the numbers of patients that PCTs will pay for. Overhead costs of PFI projects keep rising year by year even while trust budgets decline.

And more attention is being paid to the number of treatments that are being excluded from NHS provision by desperate PCTs in the name of so-called "efficiency savings." Waiting times have already sharply increased. The private sector is licking its lips in the wings, just waiting for more frustrated patients to go private.

All this keeps the NHS in the public eye. It's up to the unions, local campaigners and the Labour opposition to turn this concern into action that builds pressure for a change of course.

Cuts of £20 billion can only be achieved at the price of devastating our health service. Who out there thinks that this is a price worth paying?

Choice costs an arm and a leg

I have just had a very interesting insight into the assumptions of the private sector at a conference of health journalists in Philadelphia.

It is clear that in the US the entire system revolves around the interests of the insurance companies and the private sector. Obama's plan to create new affordable insurance provision for the poor relies on state subsidies to enable the poor to buy policies, which even then will only reimburse them for part of the cost of their treatment.

Interestingly a succession of speakers referred in discussions on the reforms to "medical loss." This turns out to be the share of insurance income than is spent on patient care, cash which is therefore regarded by insurance companies as lost profit.

From the patient's point of view the loss is the other way round, but even Obama's reforms only seek to limit the amount pocketed by the insurance companies from premiums to 15 per cent of large company schemes and 20 per cent of the contributions paid by individual and small-scale insurance policies. Some companies are apparently up in arms at this constraint on their profits and are threatening to pull out.

In addition, under the Obama plans, insurance companies would be free to raise premiums by up to 10 per cent per year without having to face any inquiry at all, regardless of whether or not these increases are affordable by those who are to be compelled to buy health insurance.

The margin retained by insurance companies to cover their extensive bureaucratic costs, advertising, other overheads and generous salaries to their chief executives - in addition to a profit margin for shareholders - is only part of the total wasted by the arcane US healthcare system.

Out of the 80 to 85 per cent that will have to be spent on patient care, a substantial amount will be squandered on inflated hospital and medical bills to cover the overheads of private hospitals and their bureaucratic administration.

At every level the patient, as an individual consumer of healthcare in the US, comes at best a poor second place to the commercial and financial concerns of a system supposed to be concerned with their health. Overall the US spends between 25 and 30 per cent of every health dollar on administration.

But it gets worse. The new insurance schemes to be offered under the Obama plan will offer varying levels of cover to compensate patients for the often huge costs of their care.

The minimum schemes - most attractive to younger, healthy adults - will cover just 60 per cent of costs. The most generous and most expensive schemes will cover around 90 per cent of costs. This means that millions of patients will have to pay money out of pocket to access healthcare even after the reforms. This is what the free marketers wanted.

As one speaker stressed "health care will still not be free: some people will be shocked at the scale of out-of-pocket spending."

But while patient care may not be the priority, maintaining patient choice is seen as an important principle in the US health system - resulting in a baffling array of complex choices to be made by ill-informed patients struggling to

understand the difference between literally hundreds of rival policies that look very similar.

One speaker, whose job is to help explain the insurance market to baffled consumers, actually said: "Health insurance is always going to be complicated - it's never going to be like choosing one apple from another."

In other words patient choice is by no means always a good thing. And in the US it can cost an arm and a leg.

John Lister is information director of Health Emergency

London Health Emergency campaign broadsheet

Source: <http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk/2011/04/london-health-emergency-campaign-broadsheet/>

London Health Emergency has produced a campaigning special broadsheet against the ConDem Health Bill just before the high profile announcement of a "pause" in the process of pushing the legislation through.

We now have a real opportunity to step up the offensive against this pernicious Bill in the next couple of months.

The broadsheet shows the vision of the NHS which Lansley is promoting, that is to transform the National Health Service into a national health market. New GP consortiums will be able to obtain health services from "any willing provider" on the basis of cost rather than quality. The Bill will also see tens of thousands of hospital jobs axed, and hundreds of thousands pushed out of the NHS workforce into private companies. This would be the biggest privatisation ever.

Opposition to Lansley's Bill is gathering pace. After the BMA condemning the Bill, now the Royal College of Nursing has just voted by 99% no confidence in Andrew Lansley.

The NHS faces its biggest-ever threat: a 'double whammy' of massive cuts year by year to 2014, coupled with the White Paper proposals that could wipe out all public sector provision of health services.

It's still possible that, together, we can Kill Off Lansley's Bill and save our NHS!

Local anti-cuts campaigns should order from London Health Emergency the special broadsheet: 100 costs £25 including postage, and 1000 could be delivered direct from the printers for £190. LHE will also send out "Kill off Lansley's NHS Bill" campaign stickers. Contact LHE at www.healthemergency.org.uk

Manchester- Council tries to block Sure Start protests

Source: <http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk/2011/03/manchester-mule-reveals-council-s-attempts-to-block-parents-campaigning-against-the-closure-of-sure-start-centres/>

Press Release from Manchester Mule

Council tried to block out parents campaigning to protect Sure Start centres

Spin doctors at Manchester City Council ordered members of staff to block out parents campaigning against the closure of Sure Start centres in the city, according to a leaked email.

The document, seen by independent local publication Manchester Mule, refers to the Save Manchester Sure Start Campaign, a network which brings together parents' campaign groups from centres across the city. Sent out by the Communications Manager of Children's Services Yvette Cox on March 15, it instructs employees on how to "manage parent communication sessions so that they won't be hijacked by this group".

In addition to "managing" the sessions, the document instructs staff "not to respond to the group directly" and warns not to "provide the group with any information."

Meetings between parents and Sir Richard Leese, leader of the council, to discuss the cuts were subsequently arranged for each of the city's 36 children's centres following a vigorous campaign organised to protect Manchester's Sure Start Service against severe cuts.

Under the council's budget plans, passed two weeks ago, cuts are to be made to a quarter of the city's children's services. Sure Start centres providing day care, health and family support and early education for pre-school children are to be wholly outsourced to be run by schools, voluntary groups and, campaigners fear, private companies.

The tendering process is anticipated to be rolled out over two stages over the next 12 months and it is currently unclear who will run the centres. Executive for children's services Councillor Sheila Newman stated in a letter to parents that "it is inaccurate and misleading to say that decisions have been taken to close services or offer the services to a big private provider."

The cuts come as part of a national attack on Sure Start by the coalition government, with a Parliamentary question tabled by Labour shadow education secretary Andy Burnham revealing that the service is to lose an average of 23 per cent of its funds. In Manchester £8 million has been lost from the Early Intervention Grant, which pays for the centres in addition to support for disabled children, community groups and guidance and support for young people.

Manchester City Council have so far failed to respond to enquiries about the content of the leaked email.

Save Manchester's Youth Service!

Source: <http://coalitionagaincuts.wordpress.com/2011/03/17/save-manchester-s-youth-service/>

With Manchester City Council planning to cease all funding to the Youth Service an open letter to Council leader Richard Leese is circulating calling for a rethink over the closure plans.

Labour Councils face twice the level of cuts compared with Tory controlled Councils as the Tory led Coalition Government have cut funding to children's services nationally. Manchester's youth are amongst those with the greatest needs, with rising unemployment levels, opportunities for further and higher education now unaffordable to many, and the loss of support organisations like Connexions.

Only Labour led Manchester is set to close its entire Youth Service. There are currently 34 Youth Centers and Projects across the city, and hundreds of skilled youth workers jobs have already gone.

The consequences of closing the Youth Centers are obvious to many, although former youth worker, now Sir Richard Leese, seems oblivious to the dangers of young people in the City abandoned to an uncertain future.

Manchester was scarred by riots in the early 1980's, and the City has only recently emerged from a series of gun and gang related tragedies.

.....

Dear Richard Leese, leader of Manchester City Council.

Save Manchester's Youth Service!

We write with serious concerns of the consequences of destroying the Manchester Youth Service.

Added to the rising levels of youth unemployment, the removal of the EMA grants and unaffordable tuition fees, and the elimination of Connexions, now the Manchester Youth Service is to be closed, and hundreds of youth workers jobs have already gone.

These Cuts are set to create conditions similar to those seen in this city in the early 1980's under the Thatcher government. The consequences of having no Youth Service are obvious

- more young people 'criminalised' as they are left to use the streets, as the Youth Centers close
- vulnerable children abandoned by those with whom they can develop relationships, and put at greater risk
- increasing anti social behaviour and rising levels of youth crime
- the attraction of gangs, guns and knives to some of our youth, as positive youth work ceases
- opportunities for racists and fascists to exploit feelings of despair
- a generation of young people abandoned

Your decision to close the Youth Service was made without consideration of the consequences. No Equality Impact Assessment has been done, yet services cannot be legally be changed or scraped without one. Young people and communities were not consulted in line with the Education Act, yet the Council has a statutory duty to consult the youth who use the services.

We demand that you urgently review the closure decisions, and properly consult all those effected by your decision.

The Tory led government is making the biggest cuts to Councils like Manchester that have the largest numbers of young people with the greatest needs. We urge you to adopt a strategy of resistance to these cuts so that funds can be won or located to ensure the continuation of Youth Centers in Manchester

.....

Open Letter initiated by Manchester Coalition Against the Cuts

email names to krantz.mark@gmail.com

Post back to PO Box 111, Chorlton M21 0AA



Fair pay for Royal cleaners

Source: <http://collectiveresistance.com/2011/04/27/fair-pay-for-royal-cleaners/>

Subservience, hypocrisy, parasitism and patronising contempt for working people are the cornerstones of the British monarchy. One of the ways we know this is because the women and men who clean Buckingham Palace are paid £6.45 per hour. The London Living Wage of £7.85 is "the minimum pay rate required for a worker to provide their family with the essentials of life" according to its promoters Citizen UK. There is a pun to be made about princely sums but let's not.

According to her own website Elizabeth Windsor receives £7.9 million of public money each year but this is boosted to £38.2 million by additional benefits called "Head of State support". Nice work if you can get it. Oops you can't because you were born into the wrong family.

The PCS union has set up an online petition to try to win a pay increase for the cleaners. Its demands are modest: "We, the undersigned note that cleaners working for the Royal Household in London are paid £6.45 per hour even though the London Living Wage is set at £7.85. Cleaners in the House of Commons and House of Lords are paid at the rate of the London Living wage.

As £30 million of taxpayer's money is paid to the Royal family annually for the upkeep of the Royal Households it is clear that the London living wage of £7.85 is affordable.

Why then are the people who work so hard to maintain standards at The Royal Households, paid so little?

We call upon Jeremy Hunt, Minister for Culture, to ensure that all cleaners working within the Royal Households are paid the London living wage of £7.85 per hour, a rate that is supported by the Mayor of London."

Anti-fascism: EDL blocked in Brighton

Source: <http://sussexsocialistresistance.blogspot.com/2011/04/edl-blocked-and-harried-in-brighton.html>



The Movement For England attempted to claim over the past few months that they were nothing to do with the EDL. The organisers repeatedly stated that the EDL would not be welcomed and that their march would be a peaceful, family friendly event. Anti-fascists had been pointing out that this would not be so, as the presence of EDL banners showed. Their love affair with the State of Israel also seemed to be over, following the splits with JDL, as no Israeli flags appeared for once.

On the route, in response to the anti-fascists slogans of "We are black, white, asian, jewish and gay", EDL supporters shouted out, "you're not English anymore". Now how they knew the heritage of anti-fascists and could suddenly decide that the dna had changed is amazing. What is English anyway as we all have mixed blood of one sort or another? Do they then intend to deport those who are not pure? Where did the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Danes and Vikings come from, certainly not Essex!

Well done to the anti-fascist movement in making every effort, under extremely difficult circumstances, in defending multi-culturalism and showing that the EDL were not welcomed here or anywhere else.

Report from Peoples Republic of Hove blog:

The EDL were chased around Brighton by anti-fascists and the photos give some idea of the massive and oppressive police operation (involving 5 forces) - oppressive, that is, towards the anti-fascist contingent. To the EDL, they could not have been more accommodating, even to the extent of facilitating a further drinking session for them after their march had ended, rather than just getting them out of the city as soon as possible.

Extensive use was made of the notorious Section 14 of the Public Order Act to try to intimidate anti fascists - it didn't work, and we were able to block Queens Road for over an hour. There were however a number of random arrests of activists.

Among the positives of the day -

- the "respectable" veneer of March for England was well and truly stripped away. This was without question an EDL march.

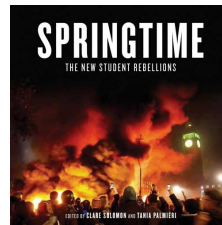
- different anti-fascist groups worked well together.

- although numbers were less than we would have liked, it was really encouraging to see the hostility towards the EDL from ordinary locals.

REVIEW: Springtime: The New Student Rebellions

Source: <http://www.counterfire.org/index.php/articles/book-reviews/11731-springtime-the-new-student-rebellions>

Clare Solomon has edited a book with Tania Palmieri on the students' and young people's uprisings that have shaken colleges and universities from Britain to Greece, Italy, France and beyond. Andrew Burgin explains its importance.



***Springtime: The New Student Rebellions*, ed. Clare Solomon and Tania Palmieri (Verso 2011), 283pp.**

I'm a bit shaken myself. And I'm sure you're just as shocked as me. Clare Solomon editing and writing large bits of a book. How did that happen?

Clare is a comrade of mine in Counterfire but she is also President of University of London Union (ULU), the main leader of the new student rebellions, a single mother and someone who has taken the expression 'work hard, party hard' into a new galaxy. Eat your heart out Emma Goldman. Emma is famously misquoted as saying 'if I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution' but Clare certainly did say 'if you can't dance don't bother coming to ULU'.

How did she find the time to do the book? A question along the lines of 'is there a God and does she give a damn'.

Unanswerable.

And more – I know that she's been on a delegation to Tunisia this year, made breakfast for several thousand students on the big feeder march for the 26th and is just about to launch a defence campaign for those arrested off the demonstration. Last year she set up the Greek solidarity campaign and spent large parts of the summer in Greece working with those opposing austerity there.

The second thing is why a book? It's so twentieth century. We all know students don't read books, let alone write them. They surf the internet and social media and much of their writing is online, on websites and they read from improbably sized phones or kindles or laptops. When the publishers Verso approached Clare about doing the book she made it a condition of publication that there would be a free download of the whole thing.

And the book is pretty cheap anyway. Illustrated throughout with photographs from various student demonstrations and with 283 pages it's a steal at £9.99. So well done Verso. I don't know how they'll make a profit.

Maybe the publishers are re-living their own student days. Verso, originally New Left Books, was set up and is still run by the student leaders from the 1960s, Tariq Ali, Perry Anderson and others. Throughout the book there is a series of flashback pages of poems, songs and short articles from that period. The book is a reminder of those times.

Though I'm not that sure about the need to have a page with the handwritten lyrics of Mick Jagger's 'Street Fighting Man', which was written as a homage to Tariq for the role he played in the Vietnam demonstration at Grosvenor Square in 1968. I never much liked the Stones and I think even Lindsey German, who was a big fan of theirs and used to do the airport thing, would have to admit that 'dubstep' – the sound of the student demos last year – was a big step forward musically from that produced by Mick and Keith.

So, in the book, I'd rather have seen some of rapper Lowkey's lyrics – they are the pulse of these new struggles:

'we come out to protest / do you just come out to brawl?' says Lowkey to the police.

However, that nitpicking aside, for an old-fashioned and old book dealer like myself the book is a treat. It's intelligently put together and makes good use of the social media which inspired and helped organise much of the protests. The artist Noel Douglas has created an engaging artwork at the heart of the section on Britain. This reproduces some of the twitter feed from the demonstration days, and incorporates Peter Kennard and Cat Phillips' photomontage of Cameron and Clegg dressed as riot police battering students.

One of the most impressive parts of Clare's leadership in the student movement was her support for those who had laid siege to and occupied the Tory party headquarters at Millbank in early November. She bested the patronising Jeremy Paxman on Newsnight, when he sought to play the outraged-citizen card, and she revealed the lack of political principle at the heart of NUS president Aaron Porter's sappy career prospectus. And all this without being unnecessarily rude to her political and media opponents. Clare takes us through all this and lays the foundation for the book in her opening chapter, 'We felt liberated'.

It is clear - and several of the contributions in the book make this point - that the action to occupy Millbank had the support of a significant minority or more of the joint UCU/NUS demonstration on November 10th. It was that semi-spontaneous action, which involved many thousands of students that galvanised the movement. It was a 'did we really do that' moment.

The occupation of Millbank energised not just the student movement but also the school students and FE students who came out on the streets in December, in the snow, to try to defend the Education Maintenance Allowance on which so many of them rely. Furthermore this new movement shifted the wider labour and trade union movement into action. Millbank was followed by a wave of university and college occupations. Both Jo Casserly and Elly Badcock make the how and why of occupations the centre of their pieces. At their height, the occupations spread to the schools with Camden School for Girls, as usual, leading the way. Tens of thousands of school students protested in December.

When on those later demonstrations the students were viciously attacked by the police, it was their own lecturers, their teachers and, significantly, trade union leaders like Len McCluskey of Unite who spoke out on their behalf. Moreover it was those still politically active from the 1960s such as Tariq Ali who went to the occupations to show their support. In the book there are several pieces from those lecturers, including an incisive account from Nina Power about the drive from university management to make lecturers police their own students. Quite frightening.

Susan Matthews, lecturer and mother of student Alfie Meadows, who himself was seriously injured by the police, writes of her own experience on the demonstrations and her perception of the uprising through the vision of William Blake's Albion Rose.

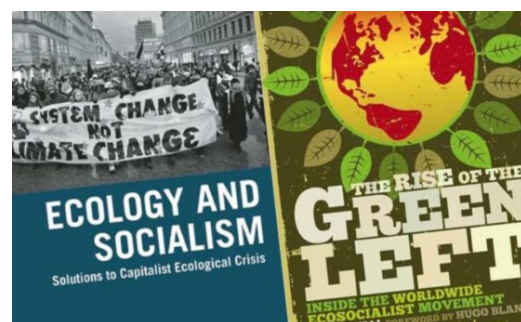
There is much good writing in the book, and given the swift publication timetable the inclusion of pieces on the Tunisian revolution is impressive.

A small aside on the furore surrounding the direct action initiated by UKUNCUT and the Black Block on the 26th March. Nothing of value was taken from Fortnum and Mason on that day except the trust of many good-hearted protesters in the honest word of the Metropolitan Police. The Black Block, however, already knew not to trust the police (except for those of them who were the police) and so none of them was arrested and the police search for them still. *Springtime* could be of help here! One chapter is entitled, 'Who are the Black Block? Where is the Black Block?' Well, the answer seems to be: somewhere in Rome, making cappuccino and cooking steaks. A clue for the Met :)

REVIEW: Capitalism, climate change and the Left

Source: <http://www.counterfire.org/index.php/articles/book-reviews/11018-capitalism-and-climate-change>

Can we solve the daunting problem of climate change within a capitalist system? This is no academic question - a wealth of scientific evidence points to the potentially catastrophic scale of climate change.



here remains a huge gulf between what needs to be done to stop climate change wreaking destruction and the solutions offered by political and business leaders. While seemingly everyone proclaims their 'green' credentials - except of course the 'climate sceptics' who deny climate change - the dominant solutions are superficial, trapped within the logic

of the very system that has generated such terrible problems in the first place.

Ecology and Socialism, by US-based environmental activist and science academic Chris Williams, scrutinises the mainstream arguments and offers a more radical alternative, as indicated by its subtitle: *Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis*. Derek Wall, an activist in the Green Left current of the UK's Green Party, is similarly concerned with outlining an alternative to capitalist remedies. His book, *The Rise of the Green Left: Inside the Worldwide Ecosocialist Movement*, locates the causes of climate change in the unchecked expansion of the global capitalist economy and outlines a manifesto for change.

As both titles will make apparent, the authors are united by wishing not only to re-assert the relevance of the socialist tradition but also clearly establish it on a twenty-first-century basis: a socialism relevant to an age of ecological destruction on a scale unimaginable to Marx 150 years ago. The term 'ecosocialism' is increasingly used by left-wing activists in a number of countries and across a range of organisations, whether (like Wall) as a minority current inside a sizeable and broad-based green party or (like Williams, a member of the International Socialists in the US) as an independent Marxist organisation.

They build on the work of a number of socialists, like John Bellamy Foster, Joel Kovel, Ian Angus and Michael Lowy, who have in recent years sought to relate anti-capitalist critique to ecological concerns. Writers like Bellamy Foster have stressed that they are renewing a long tradition, going back at least to Marx, of examining humanity's relationship with nature and developing a version of socialism that takes ecology seriously. Yet such radical approaches have remained marginal to climate debate - unsurprisingly, perhaps, when we consider the wider marginalisation of Marxism and the left politically.

Williams deploys apocalyptic language: 'Capitalist society threatens the breakdown of the basic biogeochemical cycles of the biosphere as we have come to know them'. But he's right to do so - and a well-informed chapter on the science of climate change demonstrates why. Elsewhere he explains exactly why 'capitalist society' is responsible, drawing creatively on the Marxist tradition of political economy. It is not simply a question of growth per se - as many environmentalists appear to think - but the nature of the anarchic, competitive capitalist market which inevitably promotes growth as the goal.

As well as outlining carefully why capitalism is responsible for the problem, Williams uses this as the basis for taking apart the system's supposed solutions. These 'solutions' have in common an unwillingness to challenge the workings of business. They fail to address the scale of the challenge - not due to a failure to recognise how serious our predicament is, but because doing so would challenge the system itself.

This is important because even many fairly radical environmentalists often act as if the difficulty is simply one

of awareness: if only people with wealth or power recognised what is going on, they could be pressured into instigating more radical solutions. Williams shows conclusively this is wishful thinking; the systematic problems of capitalism always foil any individually-based good intentions. A more radical social and economic challenge is needed.

Williams is very good at outlining what he calls 'socialist sustainability' would look like. This is very refreshing, offering an inspiring vision to counteract the gloom that can easily paralyse us when considering the future of our planet, and benefits from using our present situation as the starting point - far preferable to nostalgically harking back to pre-capitalist utopias. It is a strong example of using the Marxist tradition not as an end point, or as a collection of dogmas, but as a basis for getting to grips with new social realities.

The book also benefits from the chapter called 'Real Solutions Right Now: What We Need to Fight For'. I found this rather dry - perhaps unavoidable considering the subject matter - and it could have gained from being a little more concrete and specific. But it is still helpful as a means of launching demands and campaigns that move beyond limited and phoney market 'solutions', challenging the social and economic basis of climate change.

Williams does not evade the question of political organisation either - he makes it clear the Democrats cannot be any kind of meaningful political avenue for those passionate about the environment in the US. Frustratingly, though, he fails really to develop the more general implications of this for what should be done, how we might organise and the strategies we need.

Derek Wall's book is more concerned with practical campaigning, strategy and organisation, as well as providing some similar analysis to Williams (though generally not in such detail). It is a useful complement to Williams' work and especially recommended for anyone active in the movement. Wall even offers a potted history of Marxists and others on the left who have written about the environment. I especially enjoyed this chapter - it shows that ecological concern is not new on the left and, while I do not agree with all of his assessments (e.g. his mostly dismissive attitude to Lenin), the overall picture is very welcome.

It could be argued that 'ecosocialism' is problematic as a concept - who is in and who is out when it comes to defining an 'ecosocialist' movement? Isn't all socialism concerned with ecology? But - with this caveat in mind - I think it's useful for Wall to foreground ecological issues and stress their centrality to any relevant modern-day critique of capitalism. He is also completely justified in arguing that an alternative ecological vision - as with Williams' 'socialist sustainability' - is integral to how we formulate socialism in the twenty-first century.

I am not, however, entirely convinced by every aspect of Wall's ecosocialism. His stress on 'the commons' is

too open to interpretation - he seems to be suggesting that there is more space within capitalism for 'reclaiming' public or shared space and resources than I think is plausible. The issue here is precisely the global nature of the massive problems we face, which means challenging global structures and institutions. 'Local' solutions - Wall sometimes leans towards versions of 'localisation', while being too shrewd to ever entirely lose sight of the bigger picture - are no solution, and I feel the author gives them rather too much credibility.

That should not distract, though, from the strong internationalist politics running through the book. As the title and subtitle suggest, this is consciously a contribution to strengthening connections across borders and increasing co-ordination. It is an emphasis which stems from the widespread recognition among socialists that we have common cause globally, with links between developed and less developed countries especially vital.

Wall is keen to be pluralistic, recognising contributions that can be made by different political currents and insisting there can be no single 'right answer' or 'correct line' when it comes to ecosocialist strategy. This is a strength - in its openness and desire for unity - but I think also a slight weakness, as the chapter on strategy ('Slow the Train!') suffers from being too vague. There are still, nonetheless, inspiring and practical ideas and examples, with the author's wide-ranging knowledge of real struggles to defend the environment and for social justice (especially in Latin America) shining through here.

Both of these books are welcome additions to the socialist literature on climate change: why it is happening, why it cannot be resolved without fundamental social change, and what we *can* do about it. Williams is especially powerful in analysing the problem - and also the flaws in the market solutions offered by the mainstream of the movement - while Wall gives activists a lot of ammunition, ideas and inspiration. Both are worth reading for the insights they offer.

A Cutback by Carol Ann Duffy

The Poet Laureate is on our side!

All we want are strategic cuts, it's no go salami slicing.

It's no go the Poetry Trust, it's no go in East Suffolk;
Aldeburgh's east of Stratford East. As Rooney says, oh f-fuck it –
because it's no go First Collection Prize, it's no go local writers.
We've been asked to pull the plug, the rug, by coalition shysters.

National Association of Writers in Education?
No way, NAWE, children and books, the train's leaving the station.
It's no go your poets in schools, it's no go your cultures.
All we want is squeezed middles and stringent diets for vultures.

It's no go the pamphlet, the gig in Newcastle no go.
All we want is a context for the National Portfolio.

Three little presses went to market, Flambard, Arc and Salt;
had their throats cut ear to ear and now it's hard to talk.
They remember Thatcher's Britain. Clegg-Cameron's is worse.
Deathbyathousandcuts.co.uk, the least of which is verse.

It's no go the avant-garde, it's no go the mainstream.
All we want is a Review Group, chaired, including
recommendations.

Stephen Spender thought continually of those who were truly great;
set up the Poetry Book Society with TS Eliot, genius mate.
But it's no go two thousand strong in the Queen Elizabeth Hall.
Phone a cab for the Nobel laureates as they take their curtain call.

It's no go, dear PBS. It's no go, sweet poets.
Sat on your arses for fifty years and never turned a profit.
All we want are bureaucrats, the nods as good as winkers.
And if you're strapped for cash, go fish, then try the pigging
bankers.

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