

NO ROOM FOR BENEFITS

Official statistics reveal that an estimated 1200 families in Haringey are losing £100 a week or more due to cuts in benefits, and a further 400 are losing less than this. Those who face smaller losses may be able to make up the shortfall and keep their tenancies, but at the cost of scrimping on food or heating their homes. Others will more than likely end up in arrears and be forced out of their homes to low rent areas outside the borough, even out of London, away from family and other support.

Haringey is one of four boroughs presently piloting the benefit cap scheme. The Council have said that no one affected by the cap will be evicted while the pilot is in operation. But what about after? Local MP David Lammy suggested that next year Haringey would have to evict people with huge rent arrears.

The cap has been imposed by the government with the stated intention of encouraging those on benefit back into work. If a single parent can find a job for 16 hours a week (or 24 hours for couples) then they will be exempt from the cap. But where is the work? Jobs are scarce, and even if work is found, childcare is expensive.

The attacks on the poorest most vulnerable people in our society don't stop there. Another of the welfare "reforms" is the bedroom tax. This applies to tenants in the social rented sector, who are deemed to be under-occupying their home. If you have a spare room then you will get a 14% cut in your benefit, or 25% for two spare rooms. The options are to make up any shortfall yourself or to move to a smaller property. The problem is that anyone willing to downsize will have real

trouble finding suitable accommodation, because there are very few one or two bedroom properties available. Meanwhile you still have to pay the extra.

In other housing news, self-styled 'community housing inspectors' paid a visit to letting agents in Green Lanes, to expose their greedy and discriminatory practices. This was a follow up to a similar event in October. The inspections showed how letting agents were promoting unaffordable rents, discriminating against benefit claimants, charging extortionate fees and not offering secure tenancies. Passers-by were informed as to what was happening and were very supportive of the action.

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TOTALLY INDYPENDENT

Newsletter of Haringey Solidarity Group
www.haringey.org.uk

"Those who do not move, do not feel their chains" - Rosa Luxemburg

SPURS COCK UP

As reported in the last issue of Totally Independent, Haringey Council has published their vision for Tottenham. The latest update of this plan is 'a major sports led regeneration' focusing on the enlarged Spurs ground and the west of the High Road.

Their vision, as published in their latest glossy 'consultation' brochure, outlines three options for the area which propose demolishing some or all of the existing Council housing on the Love Lane estate which houses 379 families. The Council has not offered any option to retain, and invest in, all the existing council homes in the area.

The project will receive £40 million in public subsidy, which includes £8.5 million from the Mayor of London for a 'walkway' from White Hart Lane station to the new Spurs ground - right through where Ermine House and the Whitehall Street blocks now stand.

Tottenham Hotspur, even though it is the 13th richest football club in the world, are contributing nothing to this plan - they

have effectively been given public money to finance their own profit making.

David Cunningham of Ermine House (facing possible demolition) says, 'The big problem is that there is no plan for fixing what's there, to restore the blocks to good order. They are letting big business dictate the terms. It's all geared up for Tottenham Hotspur'.

Haringey Council promises that new social housing, but not necessarily council owned, would be built on the site. Scandalously, the Council has not yet told tenants whether the new homes would be let at existing council 'target' rents, with permanent tenancies, or at much higher near-market rents, with five-year tenancies. There can be no doubt that the aim is to increase local housing costs (rents and property values), pricing local people out of the area.

The campaign group Haringey Defend Council Housing has held meetings with the residents of the Love Lane/Whitehall St.

estate. They feel that people's concerns about their homes and their future are being cynically neglected, and that full information has not been provided to residents.

Amongst other demands they are calling on Haringey Council:

- To provide an option of improvement not demolition for all the council housing at Love Lane. This should include a concierge service and new kitchens and bathrooms, to reach the Decent Homes Standard.
- To provide clarity about the level of rents and the type of tenancy that tenants can expect, BEFORE consulting about whether residents want their homes demolished.
- To demand that Spurs put investment money back into the community, given the vast profit they stand to make from this redevelopment.

For more info: <http://ourtottenham.wordpress.com> & www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

HOMELESS? HOUSING HELP YOURSELF HOW IT COULD BE

Last year the government criminalised the squatting of residential property despite the fact that, by their own reckoning, there are 650,000 empty properties in the UK whilst hundreds of thousands of families languish on council house waiting lists and almost none are being built.

In the past, however, governments and local authorities have been forced into rather different responses. In the immediate aftermath of World War 2, with thousands of families bombed out of house and home amidst the added pressure of servicemen and women returning from war, squatting underwent a dramatic upsurge.

Families up and down the country, often led by ex-service personnel, took the initiative and occupied disused barracks and prisoner-of-war camps. By 1946 the government reported that 40,000 people, with popular support, were occupying over 1,000 camps. Born out of absolute necessity, the movement rapidly became overtly political. One group,

named the Vigilantes, actively sought out empty properties in Brighton in which they installed homeless families. Meanwhile the Communist Party was sorting out Kensington flats vacated by the rich during the blitz for families from the East End. On 8th September 1946, 1,500 people simultaneously occupied flats across West London in the 'Great Sunday Squat'. Soon, the Family Squatting Movement was forcing councils to licence empty properties to Family Housing Associations for families on council house waiting lists. Far from resisting the popular mood and criminalising these acts, the government was forced to validate them, politically and practically, by accelerating and expanding its council house building programme.

Although the government of that day, as with any government, was far from ideal, it did at least go some way to recognise the right of all to decent, affordable housing - something we should all support as families struggle to make ends meet.



Picture: Chancellor George Osborne's taxpayer-funded mansion

Dodgy landlords, rents too high, house prices soaring, councils not building social housing, people sleeping on the streets. Sound familiar? Trying to find a decent home is a nightmare. Surely there must be a better answer for something as essential as a roof over our heads. Well, we think there is.

Rather than our benefits or wages going to finance some smug landlord or pay excessive interest to banks, there are other ways housing could be organised.

We could start building thousands of new council houses and rent them out cheaply to those of us who need them. It's a win-win situation. Building houses means more people working. Rents would go back into council funds to build more housing or provide needed services. Only landlords and bankers lose out - what a shame!

Or people could set up housing co-operatives. Some presently build their own homes and others buy existing properties. The co-op is run by the people who live in these homes and their rents pay off the mortgage. When the mortgage is paid off, rents can come down. The co-op owns the house or flat so people pay cheaper rents. When they leave, the house or flat stays with the co-op, so new tenants also enjoy the benefits.

But in the long run things could go even further. Every street could be run by the people who live there. The houses could be collectively looked after by a residents' association for each street. Nobody would need to own their own home, but street level groups would meet to decide what repairs needed doing, set the rent levels to cover repairs and maintenance and discuss allocation of empty properties on the street. This would bring neighbours together to discuss their collective needs around both housing and things like maintenance of the street and road as well.

We need housing for all; we don't want a room, we want the whole bloody mansion!

WHO WE ARE

In 1991, Haringey Solidarity Group (HSG) emerged from the Anti-Poll Tax campaign, formed by Haringey residents with a wide range of backgrounds and views. We wanted to create a long-term, vibrant, non-hierarchical group, unlike political parties where ambitions and posturing displace real politics.

We believe in ridding ourselves of the current system which places profit and power before people's needs. This involves getting organised, fighting back and collectively taking those decisions which affect our daily lives, communities and workplaces.

We think people must take control of their community and workplace struggles, support each other, encourage practical solidarity, build the necessary skills and knowledge for those struggles and generate strong, permanent, grassroots networks.

Many of us are involved with local residents' community and campaign groups within the borough. We support workers in dispute, campaigns against public service cuts and threatened community amenities. We are active on environmental, housing and claimants' issues and resist oppressive policing and state controls.

We encourage everyone to share their views at our open, monthly meetings where consensus is the aim. We would welcome your involvement, either as an individual or a campaign group, at our meetings and discussion evenings and with practical activities including distributing this newsletter and producing other materials including posters and leaflets.

If you would like to learn more about HSG, then visit www.haringey.org.uk - find us on Facebook - follow us on Twitter @hsg - contact us at PO Box 2474, London N8 - phone 0845 223 5270 or email info@haringey.org.uk



BANKING ON BANKSY

After a Banksy stencil on the side of Poundland in Wood Green was removed and appeared for auction in Miami, then later in London (where it apparently sold for £750,000), Haringey Council announced their support for a campaign to bring it back to the borough. So why does their website say that "vandalism" such as "graffiti on walls" is "unsightly and inconvenient"? Perhaps the Council should encourage public art across the borough rather than spending thousands of pounds cleaning up graffiti it doesn't think is "artistic" enough - who knows, Haringey might end up producing the next Banksy.

If you have any comments or thoughts about this newsletter email us at: info@haringey.org.uk

PRESS PEDDLE PORNIKIES

It's no coincidence that papers are keen to give a bad image to the NHS - and not report public support - at a time when the government are privatising it. Likewise the Daily Mail's repeated tales of "benefit scroungers" supports government cuts to welfare benefits. The media present opinion as fact, individual cases as representative of all, and rarely publish the statistics that would enable us to decide for ourselves.

But even without the intent to mislead the public, the system of reporting promotes a biased and partial view.

The mainstream press get much of their news from the Press Association (PA), a private company that sells stories to the media. What PA passes on is not basic facts but largely hearsay - what other people tell it. Much of this comes from the public relations departments of companies and government, often in the form of press releases. PA rewrite these - to disguise the source and make them suitable copy for the media (newspapers, radio, TV). When the media buy a story from PA they generally treat it as fact and do not check details.

The media are run as businesses, not to inform people but to make profits for shareholders. Cutbacks in staff, which are usually to those at the lowest level, mean that reporters are usually too stretched to check facts or to go out and see what's happening on the streets.

Those sections of society who can afford to pay for public relations get their interests promoted by the media. This does not appear as advertising, which it is really, but as factual news. Journalists who reproduce false statements by government departments or police cannot be sued for libel. Libel is a law to protect not only the rich, but also the establishment. The Press Complaints Commission is more a lapdog than a watchdog, set up by the newspapers it is supposed to investigate.

We know that particular news channels and papers are biased towards particular political parties. But their owner's primary interest is profit and so will change tack if this sells more papers. Even so, they will maintain their main bias towards advertisers and capitalism.

Local newspapers reporting local stories are generally more reliable, although some local stories do come from agencies such as PA. This newsletter also has a political bias, but none of the stories come from agencies, nor from press releases. We do go out and gather information, and we try to check our sources where we can. We can do this because we are not paid, and publish this newsletter as part of what we believe in.

KNOW YOUR RIOTS



social problems is more police... Our brothers and sisters struggle to cope in schools that lack resources... We see housing policies that create housing shortages... We urge everyone in our district to organise for justice - then cars will not be burnt, stones will not be thrown."

At the end of May, riots broke out across Sweden in a situation similar to the UK back in August 2011: a 68-year-old man was shot dead by the police, and discontent erupted. Cars and shops burned and people fought the police for five nights in a row.

But people in Sweden are angry about much more than just the death of one man, as tragic as that is. The radical community group Megafonen, based in the Stockholm suburb of Husby where the unrest began, issued a statement giving their point of view. Posted to the site libcom.org, it says "Young people are being demonised to prevent all of us from seeing the truth... From our side we see a government whose answer to

Haringey, London, and towns and cities across the country, the continent and the world, face similar problems. The mass protests and demonstrations in Brazil and Turkey, both of which have faced government repression - although far more brutally in Turkey - show how widespread discontent is. The catalysts bringing people onto Brazilian streets (rising bus fares) and in Turkey (the bulldozing of a park) may be quite different, but the protests rapidly became similar. The object of popular fury is the ruling class, governments who do not listen to the people's voice and governments riddled with corruption. Grudging acceptance of the status quo quickly turned into huge anti-government demonstrations. We should follow Megafonen's advice and organise ourselves, to make a world where riots no longer seem necessary.



THE FOOD BANK WITH NO FOOD

Jobcentres in Haringey have been issuing vouchers for food banks that do not have the volunteers, money, space and - most importantly - food necessary to function properly. Claimants have been left hungry and in tears.

The problems began when Tottenham's food bank was evicted, by a developer, from its premises in Lawrence Road. The Somerford Grove Adventure Playground stepped in to help out but is unable to cope, lacking the space and resources needed.

Those involved in the food bank want to set up an efficient central store in Tottenham, home to the vast majority of the poorest households in Haringey. Meanwhile, people are being left to suffer.

Benefit sanctions, the bedroom tax, housing benefit cap, and £500 overall benefit cap are already creating serious problems for people in Tottenham: being unable to afford food and other basic necessities. The abolition of Council Tax relief, enforced by Haringey Council, will make it even worse. Benefit claimants cannot cook, turn the

lights on or keep warm when they run out of money. They face arrears on utility bills and rent and other unmanageable debts.

Food banks do not end poverty, hunger, or debt: they only feed people for three days. But they are vital when government cut incomes so low that people cannot buy necessities or pay the rent and Council Tax.

At the heart of growing poverty and inequality is the absence of any coherent policy to provide affordable homes for the past 30 years. Housing benefit went sky high because landlords profited from huge demand in a market with short supply. Instead of curbing rents the government has slashed housing benefit, leaving claimants to pay rent out of their wages or other benefits - both of which are steadily reducing in value. Without a policy of affordable housing, food and fuel poverty will increase, and so will the cost to the taxpayer of their consequences: ill-health and educational underachievement.

STITCHED UP IN BANGLADESH

Back in May a building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, collapsed and over 1100 people died as a result. An inspection deemed the building unsafe and shops and offices were evacuated, but garment workers were forced to go back to work to finish orders. Their bosses wanted them to meet their deadlines for the greedy multinational fashion houses that feed the 'needs' of consumers in the UK and elsewhere.

Bangladesh is the third largest garment exporter in the world. The industry is worth £12 billion a year but little goes back into securing the welfare of those whose skills are relied upon to deliver the 'fast fashion' that is craved by those in more prosperous nations.

Most workers in Bangladesh's clothing industry are women aged between 18 and 32 who struggle to survive with poor pay and working conditions. Most workers earn around £25 a month, but the average household spending on food, housing and education for their children comes to about £45 a month.

The corporations that profit so handsomely from sweatshop exploitation try to distance themselves from the dismal, unsanitary, unsafe conditions that exist, but they are complicit in the working arrangements that have led to over 1800 deaths in Bangladesh alone since 2006. They find low wage economies whose laws are lax on human rights and environmental standards and discourage trade union membership in order to maximise profits for the benefit of their shareholders.

Only after worldwide condemnation have fashion companies pledged financial aid to improve the situation. The Bangladeshi government has relaxed its rules on unions - making it easier for workers to stand together - and is looking to increase the minimum wage, but only after anger expressed by its citizens threatened to turn into revolt. It is only the actions of the people that have forced this turnaround, rather than as a consequence of any pressure from these multinational fashion companies.

AUSTERITY... NOT FOR GREEDY BASTARDS

On coming to power, the ConDem coalition embarked on an austerity programme to reduce the UK's deficit. As the country lurched into recession and unemployment soared, George Osborne, the Chancellor, emphasised that we all had to pay the price for the crisis following the credit crunch in 2008. Osborne's understanding of the term 'all', however, appears to exclude his wealthy chums who are not paying but taking as usual.

In April the top rate of income tax was reduced from 50% to 45%, giving a windfall of £42,500 for anyone with an income of £1 million. Last year, directors of top UK companies received, on average, incomes of £2.7m; a 43% rise over the previous year. Sir Terry Leahy, CEO of Tesco, bagged £12m whilst his workers rely on tax credits.

Meanwhile, corporations are maximising their profits, courtesy of government cuts to corporation tax which will fall to 24% from its 2010 level of 28%. But, of course, these companies are run by greedy bastards and, for them and their wealthy shareholders, tax avoidance is the only game in town. Last year Starbucks paid no tax on sales of £400m, Amazon paid £1.8m on sales of £3,350m and Google, £6m on sales of £395m. The wealthy have their snouts stuck deep in the trough, making vast profits on rising share prices which are at a higher level now than they were before the credit crunch. Gross inequalities in wealth are indicative of a sick society and British society gets sicker daily.

OUR TOTTENHAM CHARTER In 2012 the Council and property developers began promoting their 'Plan for Tottenham'. In response, 110 Tottenham residents from over 30 local groups attended a conference in April to develop a Community Charter, standing up for the interests of local communities. On May 11th, the Our Tottenham Charter was publicly launched outside the Town Hall, and those involved pledged to promote grass roots co-operation and solidarity throughout the area. For more info check out: <http://ourtottenham.wordpress.com>

THERE'S NO WORKPLACE LIKE HOMEBASE

In March we heard Homebase on Green Lanes were taking on 21 "trainees" from the local JobCentre. These workers are neither trainees nor apprentices. They are unemployed people forced to work up to 30 hours a week or lose their Job Seekers Allowance. This is the Government's workfare programme.

The so-called trainees are there for 8 weeks, then go back on the dole. Homebase can just replace them with others. More "trainees" mean fewer paid staff. So workers suffer and the dole queues get bigger. The only ones to benefit are Homebase, by replacing paid workers with free labour. If companies need workers they should employ permanent staff on proper terms and conditions and wages.

So Haringey Solidarity Group went into action. We produced leaflets and posters against Homebase, and on 1st April handed them out to shoppers using the store. Although a Homebase boss said they didn't use unpaid labour, two people we spoke to knew claimants working in the store. Sometimes bosses are really stupid!

We have picketed the store twice more, and there has been a lot of Facebook activity against Homebase. At the last picket two managers came out to tell us they will be suspending their use of workfare placements. This has since been confirmed in an official Homebase statement.

We obviously need to make sure Homebase stick to this, but it's another small victory for workers and claimants alike and shows that you can win if you put your mind to it.

Homebase are the latest of many companies to stop using free unpaid labour after their stores have been picketed. For details of other companies and the campaign against workfare, check out: www.boycottworkfare.org

The Work Programme  The Work Programme 
serco
improving people's lives

ALL WORK AND NO PAY

A recent legal judgement will force the government to release information on workfare providers that has been withheld from a freedom of information request. The government has lost three appeals and could only keep this secret by an exceptional ministerial veto.

Earlier this year four of the five workfare schemes - where people are forced to work for their dole - were ruled unlawful by the High Court, but the government rushed through new regulations (which may yet be challenged). They also passed legislation which would retrospectively prevent individuals from reclaiming benefits lost through sanctions on these unlawful schemes. Labour did not oppose this highly unusual legislation. It seems that politicians are happy to give two fingers to justice!

Workfare affects the young, the over-50's and the disabled. The five workfare schemes are:

Mandatory Work Activity: JobCentres require claimants to work up to 30 unpaid hours a week for four weeks; placements can be at for-profit organizations.

The Work Programme: the largest scheme; it replaces a similar one introduced by Labour under Flexible New Deal. Claimants are sent to private companies who can put them into unpaid work placements for up to six months, often substituting for paid staff.

Community Action Programme: similar to the Work Programme but aimed at "community service" which covers public sector jobs, meaning staff cuts in hospitals and parks.

Work Experience: mainly for 18-24 year olds, with two to eight weeks of 25-30 hours per week.

Sector-based Work Academies: a mix of unpaid work and 'training'. Work placements can be up to six weeks.

Although the government say some of these schemes are voluntary, this is not always what JobCentres tell individuals. For more info see www.boycottworkfare.org

UKIP OFF!

The political establishment has apparently been rocked by the rise of UKIP following the recent council elections. Their anti-European rhetoric accompanied by right wing policies on anything from 'benefits tourism' to doubling the number of prison places, have supposedly struck a chord with the electorate and won the tacit support of much of the mainstream press. It also seems to have led to all three main parties competing to see who can be toughest on issues such as benefits and immigration in a desperate attempt to capitalise on UKIP's success.

But let's be real - many in the Tory party agree with UKIP. They loathe anything to do with Europe unless it means more profits for their friends in big business. They support curbs on immigration unless those who come are rich enough to never have to rely on benefits or the NHS. They are against green energy such as wind farms because it means their investment in the oil and gas industry is threatened.

UKIP are just another manifestation of the 'divide and rule' philosophy which enables capitalism to continue.

UKIP seem to be harking back to a time when Britain still had an empire and was able to impose its will on its colonies to maintain economic and political superiority. Their antipathy towards anything to do with Europe and promotion of a new relationship with the Commonwealth underlies a kind of racism which must be resisted.

Of course we need to resist the simplistic appeal of this ideology. Do we really want to see hard won rights eroded, totally privatised public services run for profit, a low-wage economy founded on profits for the rich, and a society which does not respect the benefits that immigration has brought us? We must continue to expose the myths behind their policies and promote a society in which people's needs and not profit come first.

AN EMERGENCY WAITING TO HAPPEN

Plans to close down fire stations and hospitals and sack staff are being fiercely resisted across London. A&E departments at four hospitals - Charing Cross, Central Middlesex, Hammersmith and Ealing - face closure and replacement with "urgent care centres".

Professor Simon Shorvon, a neurologist, says this will "degrade" hospitals and reduce access to emergency care. Islington's Whittington hospital and Chase Farm in Enfield are also under threat. Meanwhile, the London Fire Brigade (LFB) wants to close 12 fire stations, remove 18 fire engines, and cut 520 jobs in order to save money. The Fire Brigades Union has said the plans are "reckless" and will put the public in danger.

At the end of May hundreds of residents marched through Camden to protest the cuts to fire services, and at public consultation meetings LFB officials were ridiculed by local people. A week earlier, thousands of people came to central London to protest against the government's privatisation of the NHS and plans to close hospitals. Local campaigns are challenging cuts and privatisation of services across the country.

However, demonstrations, petitions and protests may not be enough. The campaign to Save Lewisham Hospital won some concessions following huge street demonstrations and campaigning, but parts of the hospital are still to be closed. To maintain the services that we all need to live healthy, safe lives, it may be necessary to up the ante through strikes, occupations and direct action. Otherwise it's all too easy for bureaucrats and politicians to ignore us.