

Con-Dem attacks will lead to social cleansing

THE CON-DEM government and their anti-working class press would have us believe that the country is full of lazy, oversized families living the high life off benefits worth tens of thousands of pounds a year. They say that by capping total benefits that can be claimed to £500 a week and getting rid of incapacity benefit they will “incentivise” people to move into employment.

North London health worker

However, the facts tell a very different story. Only 50,000 out of some six million people who claim housing and other benefits pass this threshold. Of those the vast majority live in central London in privately rented accommodation and pay high rents.

This is due in large part to the sell-off of social housing since the 1980s and the failure of successive governments and local councils to replace the diminishing stock. These housing benefit claimants of course never actually see the majority of this money, as it is paid to the greedy buy-to-let landlords who cream off vast amounts in profit and drive up house prices.

Homelessness

THE CON-Dem changes will serve to drive lower income families with young children out of inner cities, creating a form of class cleansing or alternatively force them into substandard housing. There can be no doubt that homelessness and social fragmentation will increase and families will be forced to live in slum conditions with all of the resulting misery.

The knock-on effects of such policies can be seen by recent studies which show that the highest risk factor for parental depression is poor housing. Another recent study demonstrates that depression among parents is the most



All incapacity claimants will be subjected to yet another ‘fitness for work’ assessment. photo SP Wales

If the government wants to stop exploitation of the housing benefit system then introduce compulsory rent controls in high demand areas.

significant risk factor for teenage children’s involvement in crime and drug addiction.

The latest weapon of attack by the government is the scrapping of incapacity benefit, also the brain-child of Department for Work and Pensions chief Ian Duncan-Smith. IDS has decided that all incapacity claimants (people with disabilities) will be subjected to a new health review to ascertain their fitness for work. Has no-one told IDS that New Labour undertook precisely the same process in the last 12 months!

During these recent reviews in 2009-10 tens of thousands of disabled people were wrongly reclassified as fully fit for work or entitled to less benefit. Of those where benefits were cut or stopped 70% lodged an appeal of their decision, 60% of decisions were then reversed after this appeal.

Reports to the Socialist Party from victims of this review suggest that where the claimant could not answer a question it was automatically scored as if they were fully fit to work, without their knowledge or approval.

Programme

AS WITH the last review the current assessment does not take into account mental illness. Thousands of the most vulnerable people in our society went through the torture and anxiety of having benefits wrongly slashed or stopped, but IDS clearly feels that New Labour

wasn’t cruel enough and now wants to replicate this misery all over again.

This duplication, along with the recent cuts in child benefit for higher earners, is because the Con-Dem government want to demonstrate that they are sharing out the pain as they come for the wages and living standards of all workers.

However it is not just enough to challenge these attacks, we must offer an alternative.

If the government wants to stop exploitation of the housing benefit system then introduce compulsory rent controls in high demand areas. If it wants to incentivise paid work over benefits then increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour and if they want to increase employment opportunities for those with disabilities then fund more training and support people to maximise their potential while investing in a programme of socially useful job creation.

Children - a privilege for the rich?

ON NEWSNIGHT, multi-millionaire culture secretary, Jeremy Hunt, unleashed a vicious attack saying the state “shouldn’t support” large families. Back bench Tory MPs have joined the frenzy against a so-called ‘Shameless generation’ who are supposedly ‘using benefits to prop up their large families.’

However, according to the Family and Parenting Institute, only 3% of families have three or more dependent children. In reality, the aim of Hunt’s outburst is to open the door for further attacks on working class families – a slippery slope towards the scrapping of all benefits that provide a safety net for the children of poorer workers.

The rotten logic of this furore is that only the super-rich should be allowed to have large families.

And of course this Con-Dem government won’t stop at ‘large families’. If the coalition get away with this attack they will be bolstered to go further, attacking all families on benefits. If these plans go ahead the one million young people who are currently unemployed will be condemned to a childless, as well as a jobless, future.

Romford Tory MP, Andrew Rosindell, has said: “It is not for the government to bail these people out for ever more. If people have children, they must think about the consequences and whether they are able to cope.”

For workers it’s the consequences on the economy of the trillions spent bailing out bankers, alongside the massive bonuses they are still awarding themselves, not the paltry benefits given to low paid and unemployed families that is causing problems.

Low paid workers and the unemployed don’t need lectures from pompous politicians such as Jeremy Hunt, who are blatantly attempting to divide and rule working class people. We need a vigorous campaign to oppose all attacks on benefits.

Elaine Brunskill

Community organises to resist EDL thugs

HUNDREDS, EVEN thousands, of local people turned out to defend their community in Leicester when the hooligan English Defence League (EDL) came to stir up racism. The thuggery of the EDL was exposed when hundreds of their members broke free of police control and attacked anyone who wasn’t white as well as shops in the city centre.

Steve Score

They then attempted to march into the nearby Highfields area. This is a large, mainly black and Asian area with a big Muslim population. There had already been threats that mosques would be attacked. EDL members were met and repulsed by over 1,000 local young people. Socialist Party members and other anti-racists stood alongside the local community as they organised their own defence.

The EDL had earlier attended a ‘static protest’. Marches, including that of Unite Against Fascism (UAF), had been banned by the Home Secretary. At least 600 mainly local people also attended the UAF static protest in the city centre to show their opposition to racism, separated from the EDL by 100 yards, a huge

metal barrier, and police with dogs.

This turnout was despite the massive campaign that had been waged to keep people from going on the counter-demo. A coalition of the council, police, the local paper, faith and community ‘leaders’ and Hope not Hate had told people to stay away.

The police flooded the city with leaflets threatening dire consequences to young people in particular. Distraction events were organised on the days either side of the demo, as well as across the city. Youth clubs were ordered to open up on the day and workers were threatened with disciplinary charges if they didn’t comply.

Various media reports continuously equated the anti-racist demonstrators with the violence of the EDL, possibly the worst being the BBC output.

The police lost control of the EDL, despite a massive operation. Parts of the city centre were cordoned off, and roads blocked. Drunken EDLers abused and attacked bystanders, for example Socialist Party members witnessed a kebab shop being attacked, people inside being beaten up, and the window being kicked in by a large group of EDL thugs. When they got onto the ring road and started to attack people, Asian

people had to flee from their cars.

Socialist Party members supported the UAF rally, one spoke on behalf of the PCS. But we also stood shoulder to shoulder with the community in Highfields. We had banners and placards with “jobs and homes not racism” slogans and gave out leaflets and sold The Socialist. We showed that the Muslim population is not alone in defending Leicester. We strengthened our local links and expect to build on them.

The self-defence organised included scouts on motorbikes and in cars and rapid movement to where the EDL might turn up. At one point, a huge crowd of 1,000 people or more blocked Kent Street, one of the ways into the area that the EDL attempted to get through.

Lessons

THERE ARE many lessons to be learned. In part, the fact that some people were attacked in the city centre is the responsibility of all those who did their best to reduce the numbers of people coming into the city centre to oppose the EDL on the day. Clearly we cannot rely only on the police to defend us. Nor can we simply listen to the respectable ‘civic and community leaders.’

We need to build a movement



photo P.Watson

Local people, socialists and anti-racists block EDL’s path into Highfields.

that can mobilise tens of thousands of local people to defend not just the areas of the city under threat, but also the city centre itself. We need to build that among all the communities in Leicester.

Above all we need to build a political alternative to cut across the dangers of division and racism.

There were worrying reports of an element of ethnic polarisation taking place in some schools. A movement that fights for jobs and services, a working class political alternative, is required.

A start would be to build for the demo against cuts in services taking place in Leicester on 30 October.