

Housing cuts will mean more evictions and social cleansing

CHANCELLOR GEORGE Osborne's spending review represents a nightmare for working class people. His announcement that housing benefit would be restricted to paying for a room rather than a flat for people between 25 and 35 years came as a spiteful extra twist.

Paul Kershaw

The previously trailed proposals to cap housing benefits payments were already estimated by London councils to mean that around 82,000 families – over 200,000 people – would be forced to move from their communities and homes in central London. London councils have already block-booked bed and breakfasts and other private accommodation in places as far away as Hastings and Luton.

Research by the housing charity Shelter shows that, already, nearly half of recipients of Local Housing Allowance have to make up a shortfall of almost £100 a week – a situation created by the changes made to the benefits system under New Labour.

Osborne defends the benefit cuts saying he wants to target people who choose unemployment as a 'lifestyle choice'. Young people leaving school or college and unable to find work are making no such choice, nor are public sector workers made redundant as other services are cut. But in fact these cuts will hit pensioners,

disabled people and low paid workers; it is not just the unemployed who will suffer.

Reflecting the social pressures of his inner-city Bermondsey constituency, Lib Dem deputy leader Simon Hughes says he'll oppose plans to cut housing benefit by 10% for those who had been on Jobseekers allowance for 12 months. This policy difference highlights the political fault-lines in the governing coalition.

Families

NATIONALLY THERE are 24 local authorities in high cost areas where 40% or more of those affected by housing benefit changes are in work. Across London one-third of those affected are working. Since November 2008 the number of working people in receipt of housing benefit has increased by 235,000, mainly as hours have been cut back and as more families have to rely on just one pay packet. So these cuts will hit precisely those 'hardworking families' that capitalist politicians like to claim to speak for.

Social housing will no longer offer even the remote prospect of a secure alternative. The budget will be halved, new tenants will no longer get secure tenancies, and rents will now be around 80% of market levels. This is despite the Tories' lying pledge during the election not to attack security of tenure.

Some of the big housing associations have welcomed these changes gleefully eyeing up the opportunity to

take another step towards becoming straight commercial outfits. But a recent survey by the Chartered Institute of Housing shows that 78% of housing associations were expecting an increase in arrears as a result of the cuts.

The report shows that 54% of landlords are predicting an increase in the number of evictions due to 'spiralling arrears'. Trade unions and tenant groups should seek pledges from social landlords that they will not evict tenants hit by these changes.

Even some Tories now fear the consequence of the housing proposals. Boris Johnson has called for "transitional" measures to cushion the impact and Barnet council has written to the government expressing concern at the effects, despite the fact that they initially welcomed the proposals.

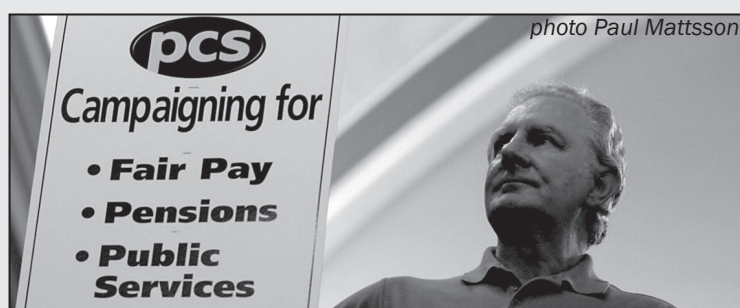
Even without the other cuts planned in the spending review, such as major incursions into council tax benefit, the changes to housing represent ample reason for the TUC to call a demonstration before Christmas in defence of their members' homes. Union leaders will not be forgiven for waiting until spring when the changes will be hitting their members.

If you are affected by these or any other government cuts get in touch with editors@socialistparty.org.uk



The 'working poor' will be hard hit by cuts in housing benefit. photo A.Hill

Government bludgeons workers' pensions



THE POLICIES announced by the Con-Dem government amount to a massive attack on the pensions of all workers.

Rob Williams,
PCS union, national executive

In the name of 'equality' the New Labour government intended to equalise the state pension age for women from 60 to 65 by 2020. The Con-Dems have intensified this attack on women by announcing that this will be brought forward to 2018 and the state pension age for all will now rise to 66 by 2020.

New Labour also planned to raise the pension age to 67 by 2036 and 68 by 2046. The Con-Dems have said they intend to bring these dates forward but have dishonestly not yet said how soon they intend to hike the pension age up further.

Increasing the pension age, as well as being a particular attack on women, is an attack on all working-class people. While the rich lead comfortable lives and retire early on their fortunes, ordinary people work harder, in worse conditions, for less. As a result the average life expectancy of men in Glasgow, for

example, is a shocking 13 years less than in affluent Kensington and Chelsea (71.1 years compared to 84.4 years). Many more working people will not now live to collect their pension.

Osborne also announced that he would raise an additional £1.8 billion by increasing public sector workers' pension contributions but avoided saying what this would really mean. In fact it would represent a 3% increase in contributions across the board at a time when pay is frozen.

This is on top of the change to the method of calculation of index linking these pensions, already announced, from the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). CPI is much lower because it does not take into account housing costs and the Hutton report says this change reduces the value of public sector pensions by 15%. So workers will pay 3% more for 15% less.

The RPI to CPI change is also being imposed on private sector workers in occupational pension schemes, to the delight of private sector bosses. This shows the need for private and public sector workers to unite to fight these changes.

Axeman Osborne slashes disabled people's benefits

WHEN GEORGE Osborne announced £11 billion cuts to welfare spending in June's budget, disabled people and their families were shocked. But few could have been prepared for the sheer brutality of the further £7 billion welfare cuts in the spending review.

As well as being affected by changes to housing benefit and the way benefits and pensions are 'up-rated' in the future, the Tory/Liberal budget made it clear that measures to move a million sick and disabled people off incapacity benefit over the next three years will continue and reductions in Disability Living Allowance (DLA) payments by £1.4 billion a year by 2014 will be made.

The spending review continued the bad news and included the unexpected announcement that Employment and Support Allowance

(ESA) will be time-limited to 12 months, except for a small number of the most severely disabled people that the notorious work capability assessment cannot define as being capable of paid employment.

In effect, chasing people off incapacity benefits and ESA is simply a way of reducing disabled people's income by about 20%-25% and has nothing to do with helping people into work.

Also, the announcement that 20,000 younger disabled people in residential care will lose their DLA mobility component will not only reduce their income by two-thirds, but also effectively end by slight of hand DLA as a universal benefit for disabled people under 65.

But rather than condemn these vicious cuts outright, New Labour's shadow chancellor Alan Johnson, in his Commons response to Osborne,

said: "Where changes are fair, proportionate and encourage work we will support them as we have shown in respect of incapacity benefit, a reformed gateway for Disability Living Allowance and on upratings."

An unbelievable statement but consistent with the fact that a number of foundation stones for the Tory/Liberal welfare cuts were laid by the governments of Blair and Brown.

Just as worrying for disabled people and their families is the response of the UK Disabled People's Council. Rather than condemn outright the Tory/Liberal cuts as Inclusion London has done in a briefing published following 'Axe Wednesday', the UKDPC's post spending review statement says it has had discussions with the minister for disabled people, Maria Miller, and stressed the need for full impact assessments that will identify the effect the cuts will have on disabled people.

If King Canute was alive today, the UKDPC would no doubt have advised him to produce an equality impact assessment before the tide came rushing in!

Given the severe impact the Tory/Liberal cuts will have on the lives of disabled people and their families, anti-cuts campaigns and the trade union Public Services Alliances need to develop links with disability and carers' organisations.

Highlighting examples of how the cuts will impact on the most severely disabled people will demonstrate to many that it is the trade unions and their allies that will protect the most vulnerable, not Cameron or Clegg.

By an Employment and Support Allowance claimant



The Con-Dems are cutting Disability Living Allowance by £1.4 billion a year.