

Housing: Rent caps, not benefit caps

'NO-ONE SHOULD ever be worse off working than they would be on benefits.' This is the carefully chosen mantra repeated time and again by Cameron, Osborne, Clegg and the rest of the Con-Dem wrecking crew to justify housing spending cuts.

North London public sector worker

This soundbite, along with the other lies being put forward by the government, will no doubt have some resonance for individuals and families working long hours on low pay and struggling to pay the bills.

However, the latest wave of government attacks on housing benefit (HB) is not designed to deliver 'fairness' but is an attempt to force workers into a spiral of lower paid jobs, economic insecurity, longer working hours and squalid housing. These attacks began under New Labour and are being accelerated by the latest incarnation of 'free market' government.

Since April 2008 the local housing allowance (LHA) has replaced housing benefit for people renting from a private landlord. Existing claimants that move house or break their claim are shifted from HB to LHA.

LHA rates are calculated using the broad rental market areas (BRMA) formula which uses average rental rates in a particular zone.

From October 2010, LHA rates have been reduced - on average by about £60 a week for a two bedroom flat in central London. However, the comprehensive spending review dealt an even more devastating blow to families living on benefits in high rent areas. The maximum LHA for a two bedroom flat has now been set at a full £190 a week below the average cost of such properties in central London.

Even for those living in parts of

outer London the gap is as high as £80 a week. For larger families needing three or four bedrooms the difference becomes astronomical, they will be expected to magic up £600 a week on top of their benefits to remain in central parts of the capital such as Westminster.

It will become impossible for individuals or families on benefits to live in private rented accommodation in 70% of the capital. Figures show that in central London boroughs only 7% of accommodation - undoubtedly the worst housing - will be affordable under the new benefit rates.

The newspapers have been full of stories about families in London receiving £40,000+ benefits but it's not the claimants who gain. They receive the same or less benefits than people in other parts of the country - it's the greedy landlords who actually receive the money.

Taken on top of the plans to introduce an 80% market threshold for rents in social housing and the already acute shortage of new social housing stock, these measures amount to social engineering and spell the end of social housing in the city over the next ten years.

Socialists, trade unionists and community organisations must explain the impact that these attacks are going to have on our communities and develop movements of resistance in our working class neighbourhoods.

Campaigners must demand rent caps not benefit caps and a programme of affordable, decent house building. Organising rent strikes when families are faced with eviction should be discussed.

Such struggles should be linked to the wider cuts movement. Socialists understand that capitalism can only maintain itself on the bones of the working class and we must fight to stop this disastrous route being used.



photo Molly cooper

Low paid workers will be hammered by the cuts in housing benefit.

- Housing budget slashed by nearly 50% from £8.4 billion to £4.4 billion over next four years. Housing Benefit (HB) will be cut by £2.5 billion.
- Rents for social housing will be increased up to 80% of the market rate.
- The HB bill has grown because rents rose by 63% between 1997 and 2008.
- In high rent areas new tenants moving into, for example, three-bedroom social housing will have to earn £54,000 to get off HB and be better off in work according to the National Housing Federation.
- A study by Cambridge University, commissioned by the housing charity Shelter, found that rent on most two bedroom properties in London would exceed the government's new HB cap.
- Inner London councils are block-booking bed and breakfast accommodation outside the capital to house tens of thousands of low income families forced to move - as far away as Hastings - because of the HB cap.
- Westminster council has lobbied the government to reduce its obligation to support families made homeless through the HB cap.
- Contrary to widespread media reports only 22% of HB claimants receive Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). The majority of claimants are low paid workers, pensioners and people with disabilities.
- An estimated 202,000 people are at risk of becoming homeless as a result of the 10% cut in HB for those on JSA for over 12 months.
- According to the Trades Union Congress, 49% of private renters and 66% of people renting social housing will face financial difficulties through a cut in HB.
- Chancellor George Osborne's additional £7 billion cut in welfare payments announced in October's spending review is equivalent to the sum which financial dealers in the City of London will get in a bonus pot this year.

India - no voice for Kashmiri struggle

BOOKER PRIZE winner and campaigner Arundhati Roy has been threatened with a charge of sedition by the Indian government and with physical threats by Indian nationalist groups. Her crime? Speaking at a meeting which discussed the fight for Azadi (freedom) for the people of Indian-occupied Kashmir.

Emma Smith

The government of so-called 'Shining India' has once again exposed its brutal nature. When David Cameron visited in June he referred to Britain and India's 'shared commitment to democracy and tolerance'. This was just another Tory lie to assist British big business interests.

The reality is far from tolerant. The Indian government not only denies the rights of the Kashmiri people but it attempts to crush those who speak out against the repression.

In the last half a year well over 100 Kashmiri people have been viciously murdered by the occupying Indian army. Most of the

dead are young. Thousands more have been maimed, blinded and injured.

At the time of writing most of the valley of Kashmir is on strike (bandh) in defiance of the army's ongoing and strangling curfew and occupation. The government has made no serious attempt to address the overwhelming desire for Azadi and has failed to bring even one murderer to justice.

The threats against Arundhati show that intolerance of opposition to the government is growing. Now the semi-fascist RSS is threatening to 'fix' her and have attacked her house. Unfortunately, given the government's stance towards the outspoken author further attacks are not ruled out and her life and freedom are in danger.

Join the protest outside the Indian high commission, India House, Aldwych, London WC2 on Thursday 4 November at 1pm. Defend the rights of the Kashmiri people, defend freedom of speech, defend freedom of assembly.

Graduate unemployment We will not be a lost generation!

A RECENT STUDY by the Graduate Careers Services Unit has revealed a huge hike in the rates of unemployment amongst graduates. Almost one in ten of those who graduated in summer 2009 were out of work the following January. This represents a dramatic increase in the levels of unemployment; the figure has almost doubled in two years.

Claire Laker-Mansfield
Socialist Students
national organiser

Those who have been lucky enough to find work, are now more and more likely to be working in low paid, part-time jobs, that do not require degree qualifications. With 725,000 expected job cuts in the public sector, and a further 900,000 in the private sector likely to follow, the situation is likely to only get worse.

For millions of young people across the country this is yet another door slammed in their faces. As Lord Browne tries to justify his plans for sky high tuition fees with the argument that graduates will have greater earning power, tens of thousands of young people with degrees are languishing in the dole

queues. Saddled with mounting debt and little prospect of a decent job, the future that the Con-Dem government has in store for graduates and all young people is a bleak one. Young people will have to fight for decent jobs and education.

On 10 November thousands of students, young people, and education workers will march through the streets of London, on a demonstration called by the national students' union (NUS) and lecturers' union (UCU).

This should send a clear message to the government: that young people and workers will not accept the bleak future that the government is offering.

Socialist Students and the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign, which has the support of UCU, will have a fighting bloc on this demonstration. We will be proposing a strategy to fight cuts and defeat the Browne Review. The demonstration on the 10th must only be the beginning of the fightback.

On 24 November Youth Fight for Jobs and Socialist Students are calling for a day of mass protests and walk-outs at campuses and colleges all over the country as the next step in building a mass campaign. We will not be a lost generation!

fastnews

Sky's the limit

IT SEEMS that the belt tightening measures imposed on us by the coalition government hasn't penetrated the boardrooms of the top 100 FTSE companies, where directors' pay rocketed up by 55% in the last year. Corporate chiefs' average pay is now a staggering £4.9 million - or nearly 200 times the average wage according to the Guardian.

Top fat cat was Bart Becht of Reckitt Benckiser, who netted £92,596,160 followed by Tony Pidgley of Berkeley Group with £38,428,724, while Tesco's director's remuneration was £17,934,000.

Bizarrely, if not surprisingly, the Institute of Directors claimed that "the majority of directors across the private sector have received a pay cut in real terms this year."

Everything must go

MARGARET THATCHER was accused of 'selling off the family silver' during her privatisation binge in the 1980s. It seems that Tory PM David Cameron has gone one better with the revelation that museums may have to sell some of their artefacts as a result of the coalition cuts, according to the head of the soon to be abolished Museums, Libraries and Archive Council.

In addition to selling some of their antiquities and laying off their curators museums will also have to cut back on educational programmes and special exhibitions.

Regional museums will also be adversely affected by central government cuts to local government funding.

Not so easyCouncil

TORY-RUN Barnet council in north-west London has enjoyed notoriety with its tag of becoming the country's first 'easyCouncil' with budget airline-inspired cost-cutting measures, including the privatisation of services.

Praised as a 'model council' by the government, Barnet's 'innovative' schemes to prune its budget included paying outside business consultants to identify areas for spending cuts.

However, it has emerged that the prudent council actually spent £1.5 million in order to save £1.4 million from its budget!

Hospital cuts

FOR THE third time in as many years, regional health bosses - with government approval - have announced their intention to transfer maternity services from King George's Hospital in Ilford, east London, by 2012 and to close its A&E department by 2013.

A final decision on the Hospital's future will be taken following a public meeting of the relevant health trusts on 15 December. Transferring the A&E, critical care and maternity services will put even more pressure on overstretched resources at Queen's Hospital in Romford located several miles away. Patients' lives will be put at risk. Yet, unbelievably, health officials claim that "operating A&E from fewer sites can deliver better care".

The real reason for these cuts is that the health trust is deep in debt due to the exorbitant cost of servicing its privatisation contracts, including the building of Queen's Hospital.