

MPs' expenses scam continues For workers' MPs on a worker's wage

ON 7 January 2011 the former Labour MP for Bury North, David Chaytor, was sentenced at Southwark Crown Court to 18 months' imprisonment for 'false accounting'. He had pleaded guilty to using a fake tenancy agreement and then claiming just over £20,000 in Parliamentary expenses to pay rent on a house in Westminster which he in fact already owned and on which the mortgage had been paid.

Councillor Dave Nellist,
*Socialist Party, Coventry (former
Labour MP 1983-1992)*

Chaytor had previously failed in the Court of Appeal, together with other politicians, to claim that 'parliamentary privilege' should make him immune from prosecution for fraud.

On 11 January a second (and current) Labour MP, Eric Illsley, pleaded guilty to fraud, involving £14,000 of false claims for his 'second home'. He will be sentenced in February. Illsley has now said he will resign as an MP, and a by-election will now follow in Barnsley in due course.



Dave Nellist on an anti-cuts demo.

The police are apparently investigating several other politicians - and two ex-MPs and two peers have already been charged with similar offences to Chaytor and Illsley. But there's more.

Recent press reports now talk about other, possibly new, cases being raised by an MP, who is said to be angry that he was 'unfairly singled out over his own claims', and has 'shopped' two ex-Cabinet ministers and four MPs; three from the Labour Party, two Conservatives and one Liberal Democrat.

The anger and disgust that people, already privileged with high salaries and positions, should then fraudulently claim thousands of pounds of expenses to which they were not entitled, is widespread. A recent British Social Attitudes survey found that 60% of those questioned thought politicians "almost never" told the truth and only 28% trusted MPs not to fiddle their expenses.

No sympathy

THE NEW rules set up in the wake of recent scandals in Parliament are administered by the Independent Parliamentary Scrutiny Authority; and already some MPs are complaining about it. Those MPs will clearly have the heartfelt sympathy of tens of thousands of families who have had to challenge benefit decisions, or who now face massive cuts in essential services as part of the biggest austerity programme for generations. Or perhaps not!

MPs are already very privileged, receiving a basic wage almost three

times the average. That, and the level of their generous expenses allowances, insulates and isolates them from the normal problems affecting the majority of the people they represent.

The Socialist Party requires all its members elected into public positions, such as MPs, to take the same wage as that of a skilled worker. When myself, Terry Fields and Pat Wall were MPs in the 1980s, that worked out at around 40% of an MP's wage, or the equivalent of £26,000 today. The 'surplus' was donated to socialist and trade union campaigns and causes, and accounts were regularly published in newsletters to be transparent.

Expenses should only be allowed where clearly necessary to do the job, and again be published and accountable, particularly to the working people locally who had elected that representative.

Much of the protocols of an MP's life, and the privileges lavished on them, are designed to suck them into defence of the system, so that (whether consciously or not) they feel more in common with the rulers than the ruled.

Breaking with those traditions, living in the area that you represent, and on the same wages, facing the same bills and problems as working people in a constituency can go some way to countering those pressures, and start restoring faith that elected, socialist officials would be different. Only the Socialist Party regularly and consistently argues for that, and has the track record to prove it is not just simply words.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

LOCAL GROUPS, trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigns who want to stand candidates in the forthcoming local elections, elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly under the TUSC banner are invited to a conference on 22 January, 3.30pm-6.00pm.

The conference is scheduled to follow the NSSN conference against the cuts also being held on 22 January.

• For more information email: electioncoalition@btinternet.com



photo S.Beishon

Students demand - 'save our EMA'

Join the demos on 29 January

AS STUDENTS restart their protest action in the New Year over the rise in fees and cutting of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), a poll has revealed the extent of the impact that the attack on EMA will have on working class young people.

Suzanne Beishon

Of 160 colleges surveyed from across the country 94% thought the abolition of EMA would have a significant effect on students' ability to get to college. This is a damning indictment of the government's vicious proposal to scrap a grant that will only save a measly £500 million.

The 'Save EMA' days of action this month on 19 and 26 January will build towards two demonstrations on 29 January in London and Manchester. These student demonstrations will be the first to take place on a weekend with the aim of drawing in more support and linking the fight for a free and decent education to the broader anti-cuts movement.

The student protests have been seen by many to be the tip of the iceberg. As the cuts to public services and jobs begin to take effect there will be waves of demonstrations, protests and strikes on a scale not seen since the anti-poll tax movement of the early

1990s (see page 11).

Students have shown spontaneity and ability to organise and have won concessions in Scotland and Wales - saving EMA and defending the cap on fees.

However students will not be able to defeat the government alone; it will only be through the weight of the working class and trade union movement joining the students that we will be able to see a lasting victory. A glimpse of the power of the working class is shown when the RMT and TSSA rail unions strike and bring the 'all powerful' city of London to a standstill.

The demonstrations on 29 January have, for the first time in this struggle, won official support from a number of trade unions including the Trades Union Congress, the lecturers' union UCU and the civil servants' union PCS. Using this support to build for a huge turnout on the demonstrations and future protests and mobilising students for the TUC national demonstration in March will be the next challenge for the movement.

For the Manchester demonstration assemble 10.30am outside the Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, M13 9PL. See www.youthfightforjobs.com for latest updates on the London demonstration.

Oldham East and Saddleworth by-election

A left-wing workers' alternative needed

THE OLDHAM East and Saddleworth parliamentary by-election on 13 January, a three-way marginal seat last year, was a muted affair in much of Oldham this time. The by-election had been called after an election court dismissed Labour's MP Phil Woolas, because he had falsely accused the Lib Dem candidate during the general election of 'supporting Islamist extremists'.

By an Oldham Socialist Party member

The result constitutes a massive rejection of the Con-Dem cuts across the constituency. Labour improved its majority from just over 100 to over 3,000 votes.

The numbers voting Lib Dem held up while the Tory vote fell sharply, suggesting either Tories voted tacti-

cally for the Lib Dems whose previous support among Asian and white working class voters returned to New Labour, or the Tory vote simply did not turn out.

The result is bad news for the Tory party. The party's right-wing is already demanding more influence. This is resisted by Cameron as something which could split the fragile Con-Dem alliance. Locally, Labour claimed that Tory activists told voters to vote Lib-Dem.

Most campaigning centred on relatively affluent Saddleworth, with Lib Dems and New Labour attempting to win so-called 'Middle England' swing voters by bombarding them daily.

The other, poorer, parts of the constituency were ignored. Those are where the public spending cuts will be felt hardest. None of the main parties offered anything other than cuts, no improvements

to social and economic deprivation in an area where 7.2% of homes have no private bathroom or central heating. The council expects to make 800 redundancies, 600 of which are rumoured to be from frontline social services, affecting the most vulnerable.

The divisive and racist BNP lost its deposit, and with 4.5%, saw their percentage drop.

The New Labour victor, Debbie Abrahams, talked after the election about opposing the cuts but this was not matched by New Labour's campaign.

Abrahams resigned as chair of Rochdale Primary Care Trust over the use of private companies in health care a few years ago and supported NHS anti-cuts protests at the time. However, this was not mentioned during the election.

Oldham desperately needs a clear campaign against the cuts, council

redundancies, racism, sub-standard housing and social deprivation. None of these were addressed by New Labour, who focussed on implementing the cuts differently (no police cuts), rather than fighting the cuts.

While local voters have clearly rejected the Con-Dem cuts, any faith in New Labour and its brand of Thatcherism is misplaced. On the Socialist Party's public stalls, people say they want the bankers and rich to pay for the mess they created, not to lose public services and jobs.

A genuine left campaign would have been based on the experience of workers' lives, reaching out to the poorer parts of the constituency as well as the better-off.

On an anti-cuts basis, it would have resonated across all communities in Oldham and with workers nationally, giving impetus to the forthcoming period of intense

class struggle. Workers will require a political voice as part of the fight against cuts.



Labour's candidate benefitted from an anti-government mood.