

Heseltine continued Liverpool's decline

Former Liverpool councillor and then-District Labour Party president Tony Mulhearn shows how it was a Labour council, led by supporters of Militant (the forerunner of the Socialist Party), that saved the city from Tory decay.

Government documents released under the 30-year secrecy rule revealed that the then Tory chancellor Geoffrey Howe favoured a 'managed decline' of Liverpool following the Toxteth riots. In a breathtaking example of Tory mendacity, former Minister for Merseyside Michael Heseltine has claimed he rescued Liverpool from the fate proposed by Howe.

The blunt fact is that the decline continued. Before the 49 Labour councillors (reduced to 47 by the death of Bill Lafferty and Peter Lloyd) were elected in May 1983, in

the two years after the riots, not a single house for rent had been built by the Liberal/Tory alliance which controlled the council.

Council rents were the highest in the UK outside London. 5,000 council jobs had vanished. Some £30 million had been slashed from Liverpool's rate support grant by Heseltine's Tory government. Youth unemployment in some areas of the city was in excess of 50%.

Not one house was built by the Liberal/Tory council

The defeated Liberal/Tory alliance had left behind a financial gap of £10 million of unallocated cuts. This was the nightmare inherited by the newly elected council in which Militant supporters played a prominent role.

That scenario was not used as an excuse for doing nothing, but as a reason for carrying out the 47's election promises by launching a programme of action: building houses, creating jobs, expanding services and freezing rents.

This was backed up by a mass campaign involving the public and private sector trade unions, community organisations, youth organisations, party constituencies and party branches, led by the Liverpool District Labour Party and the 47 councillors.

The objective of this campaign was to resist any further cuts and to claw back the funds that had been slashed, with the full support of Heseltine, from the city's budget by Thatcher.

The 47 recognised that there was



The Liverpool 47 carried out its promises with the support of workers and young people photo Philip Gordon

no guarantee of victory when you fight, but if you do not fight defeat is assured.

A lesson which is completely lost on the current Liverpool Labour leadership who express outrage at Howe's proposal, yet continue to bleat that they have no choice but to cut public services that provide some support in dire circumstances like, for instance, providing care for disabled youngsters, and Sure Start facilities for young children.

'Can't fight, won't fight'

In response to the demand to fight the cuts, council leader Joe Anderson argues he does not want to bring the city into disrepute by challenging the Con-Dems. He cries that if he does not make the cuts the government will send in commissioners who will make worse cuts than him.

But if the council made a stand against the cuts and appealed to the trade union and labour movement and community groups for support and developed a mass movement, sending in commissioners would be very risky for the government. Who would cooperate with them? The council officers presumably; the same council officers who advise Joe Anderson what cuts he should make.

Instead of advising Anderson the same officers would be advising the commissioners. So Anderson and his cohorts in effect play the role of the commissioners while being paid some £60,000 a year by Liverpool's council tax payers.

30 years ago, Liverpool's Labour movement - before it was emasculated by Kinnock's lieutenant Peter Kilfoyle - knew that collaboration with the Tory government, which

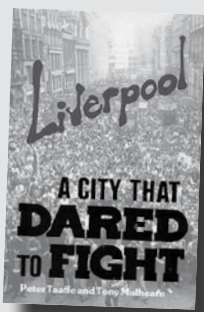
was advocated by both these gentlemen, would lead to disaster.

And disaster followed in spades. No more council housing, privatisation and job loss, a local trade union leadership ready to comply with every reactionary demand of the council.

This headlong retreat was exemplified by the fact that when the 47 were undemocratically removed from office by Thatcher's district auditor 30,000 workers were employed by the Liverpool city council. Today there are less than 10,000. Yet Liverpool council in 2010 was faced with a budget deficit of £120 million, even before the current round of Con-Dem cuts.

Decline, managed or otherwise, will continue under the Con-Dems unless the fighting spirit of the 47 and the Poplar councillors before them is emulated.

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Reader's comment: The right wing media and Diane Abbott

Senan
Tamil Solidarity international coordinator

Shadow health minister Diane Abbott was wrong when she said: "White people love playing divide and rule". The 'Twitter defence' of being 'unable to express everything in 140 characters' does not hold.

Diane is wide of the mark even if she was referring to the period of slavery in the 18th and 19th century. It is absolutely vital to insist on the difference between the 'white masters' who enslaved all races, and the white working class who often showed huge solidarity, struggling for better conditions for all. Clearly grasping the class divide has never been Diane's cup of tea. When has she gone on the defence of the working class, white or black?

But, following her tweet, there have been calls for her resignation from all sides. This is ridiculous.

That is not to say there are not reasons to demand she quits. For example, many would argue she should have been asked to stand down as a Labour MP, elected to represent working class people, when she sent her son to a private school while her New Labour government undermined state education.

Diane failed to effectively defend black people in Hackney when their services were slashed out of existence by 'posh white boys', as she



'Show me who your friends are and I'll show you who you are'

correctly calls the Con-Dems. And, during the August 2011 eruptions of anger in London she notoriously advocated a curfew - in effect an argument for bringing the military onto the street. We do not support rioting as a method of protest, but research has proved that it was anger over cuts and police harassment that fuelled these events.

However, the portrayal of Diane in the media as an 'outright racist' is wrong and crude. And, crucially, it sews seeds of confusion about what racism is and why and how it must be fought. It has created sympathy among some of the black and Asian

population for her - sympathy which is undeserved given her record.

Ruling elite

Diane would be absolutely correct to direct an accusation of 'divide and rule' towards the ruling elite, who are mostly from white rich families. Warmonger Tony Blair called for black or Asian mothers to control their kids and report on them to the police.

David Cameron got away with calling part of the community 'sick' referring to poor black people while the 'Black and Asian' MPs provided

no explanation for the anger on behalf of people living in the most deprived boroughs in the country.

There was no major outcry in the media when so-called historian David Starkey on BBC's Newsnight caricatured the rioting as 'black culture'.

The list is very long. But Diane is not aiming her attack at these people, hence the outrage.

However, the media has picked on the tweet partly to divert attention from the conviction of Stephen Lawrence's murderers and all that it exposes.

The big-business owned media seems happy to focus on nationalism and racism, issues that can sew division and atomisation of society. But it took a vibrant thousands-strong student demonstration before they caught up with growing unemployment and the Education Maintenance Allowance theft. They are still refusing to dedicate enough time to talk about the effects of the cuts, youth unemployment, etc.

When it comes to issues of organised workers' action such as strikes and occupations, protests outside government offices, etc, there is rarely sufficient column space, apart from space given to condemn such actions. They even pass on momentous historical events. For example there was virtual media silence when more than 100,000 Tamil-speaking people marched through the streets of London in 2009 demanding a halt to the massacre of Tamils by the Sri

Lankan military.

Murdochgate has exposed the connection to the ruling elite and the police. But so far the vast majority are carrying on as normal. Even the disgraced former News of the World editor has found a cosy editorial job in the USA.

As we fight the cuts, made by those who defend the interests of big business and the banks, we must also fight their mouthpieces in the media.

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