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Socialist News

An education update from
Lewisham's Socialist Party councillors
Chris Flood and Ian Page

▶ Our new school should be a community school!

LOCAL VOTERS thought they were electing their council to run local schools and services. But it seems Lewisham's New Labour councillors think their job is to give schools away to private bidders instead!

The saga of a new secondary school for the north of the borough is well known to local parents. Many groups and organisations, including the New School campaign, Save Ladywell Pool, LEAP and the Socialist Party, have fought tirelessly, first to get the New Labour mayor and cabinet to admit that a new school was needed and then, when they did accept this, to force them to build it in the north of the borough instead of demolishing Ladywell Leisure Centre!

But throughout the long campaign there was never any suggestion that the new school - now planned for Lewisham Bridge - would be anything but a local authority run community school. Now, however, the New Labour mayor and councillors are saying that a private body - like the 'Leathersellers' company who run Prendergast school - should control the school instead.

Another step to a dog-eats-dog education system

If the new school is given away to become a 'Trust', 'Academy' or 'Foundation' school, then school admissions arrangements, the employment of teachers and other school staff, and the ownership of the site and school buildings, will no longer be in the hands of the elected council.

Staff at Lewisham Bridge primary school were already far from convinced about the plan to squeeze an 'all-through' school, combining their primary school and the new secondary school, onto the Lewisham



Marching on the council in May - now we need to do it again!

Bridge site. But now this plan means they won't even be council employees.

The new school would also become the fifth secondary school in Lewisham not to participate in the borough's 'area-banding' system. (Aske's, Knight's, St Matthews and Prendergast already use their own admissions procedures). Instead of a planned comprehensive system, admissions will start to splinter into the kind of 'free-for-all' that already blights education in some other boroughs. The gap between the 'best' schools and the rest will widen further. But that means many families and children will lose out.

Councils are being pressurised into privatising schools by New Labour government legislation that means that councils can no longer just build and run a new school. Now they are being told to hold a 'competition' to see who should run it.

**Join the lobby of Lewisham council
Wednesday 18th July. Assemble at the Town Hall
in Catford, to lobby your councillors from 6-45pm.**



The new school should be *our* school!

This could result in the scandalous situation in Lewisham that over £10 million will have to be found from council resources to help fund the new school. But the school won't be owned by Lewisham! How can the mayor explain that to council tax payers?

There is an alternative

Instead of persuading Gordon Brown to change government policy, the New Labour councillor Robert Massey, who is responsible for schools in Lewisham, told the July 11th mayor and cabinet meeting that he wants to "celebrate" it. He said that community schools accountable to councillors elected by local voters was an "outdated" idea from 40 years ago. Yes, this really is 'New' Labour!

But, unlike Lewisham, some councils have fought to hold on to their schools. The London Borough of Haringey decided to put in its own 'bid' to run its new school as a community school. It successfully beat off other bidders, including Haberdashers' Aske's, so it can now run the school as a local authority comprehensive school. If Haringey can, why can't Lewisham?

Lewisham's Socialist councillors, Ian Page and Chris Flood, oppose the whole damaging 'competition' legislation. But, even if local Labour councillors won't challenge their own government's policies, at least they could follow Haringey's lead and make their own bid for the new school to be a community school!

Regrettably, the mayor rejected that approach at the July 11th cabinet meeting. But Ian and Chris are presenting a motion at next Wednesday's council meeting calling on the mayor to make a formal proposal for a community school at Lewisham Bridge. **Now there is a chance for the rest of Lewisham's councillors to have their say. Come along to the meeting and tell them what you think! The new school should be our school!**

Defend Education in Lewisham



THE DEFEND Education in Lewisham campaign was launched at a packed public meeting in Lewisham Theatre in January. It brings together opposition councillors like Ian and Chris with parents, school staff and unions who are determined to stop Lewisham's New Labour mayor and cabinet causing further damage to our children's education.

In May the campaign organised a tremendous demonstration of over 300 parents, staff and students to lobby the council, sending a clear message to mayor Steve Bullock and his cabinet.

As Martin Powell-Davies, the secretary of the Lewisham's National Union of Teachers' association and one of the campaign organisers, said to the local press, "When so many families rally to defend education, the mayor needs to realise the council has to rethink its plans. The Defend Education campaign is going to keep up the pressure on special needs education and on plans for the future of Lewisham Bridge and Monson schools. If Lewisham council doesn't think again, we'll have even more people at the next demonstration".

The mayor will now realise that he has to step carefully. The damaging plans to 're-organise' special education needs provision that were due to be pushed forward in July, for example, have been held back for now.

But we have to keep up the pressure. The plan for Haberdashers'Aske's Academy to take over Monson primary school in New Cross will be out for 'consultation' in September. The special education needs plans may also reappear then too. **The fight is still on to defend education in Lewisham!**

Your Socialist Party councillors' surgery times

Chris Flood

Telephone 020-8694-3623
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First Saturday of the month
11am to 12noon at Honor Oak
Community Centre, Turnham Road,
Honor Oak estate, SE4

Third Monday of the month
6pm to 7pm, Sector J Clubroom,
off Coston Walk, Honor Oak
Estate, SE4

Ian Page

Telephone 020-8692-0435
Email: ianpage_sp@hotmail.com

Third Saturday of the month
10am to 11am, Telegraph Hill
Centre, Kitto Road, New Cross,
SE14

Third Monday of the month
6pm to 7pm, Sector J Clubroom, off
Coston Walk, Honor Oak Estate,
SE4

I would like to join the Socialist Party get more info about the Defend Education in Lewisham campaign

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone..... E:mail.....

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