

Brighton Greens fail to fight the cuts

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Brighton local government elections in May 2011 resulted in 23 Green councillors, 18 Tories and 13 Labour, giving the Greens, elected on an 'anti-cuts' election campaign, control over the council cabinet.

Some left groups argued that the Greens should be supported 'until they start to make cuts'. The Socialist Party consistently argued that, due to their lack of a clear strategy to defy the government's austerity agenda, the Greens would inevitably slash jobs and services.

The Brighton Stop the Cuts Coalition produced an 'anti-cuts pledge' for the 2011 council elections. Most Greens said they would not oppose all cuts, but would be compassionate in protecting the vulnerable

In 2006, Brighton Green councillors supported privatisation through transferring council housing management to a private company. Yet a Defend Council Housing campaign saw these Labour-led plans overturned and the council housing

stock remained under public control.

At the 3 March budget meeting, the Greens and Labour proposed a joint amendment to the then Tory council's budget. The amendments reduced cuts by only £3 million, leaving £25 million of cuts intact.

The Brighton Stop the Cuts Coalition (BSTCC) produced an 'anti-cuts pledge' for 2011 council election candidates to sign. Most Greens argued they would not oppose all cuts, but would be compassionate and effective in protecting the vulnerable.

The Greens say that councillors have no choice over reduced budgets. The Socialist Party have countered this by pointing to the 1983-87 Liverpool city council, where 47 Labour councillors built a mass movement to back up the council in setting a budget to reflect local needs instead of the Thatcher government's dictates.

'Not possible'

The Greens argued that a similar movement could not be built today in Brighton or anywhere else in the country. This underestimates the strength of feeling against the cuts.

Since early 2010 Brighton has seen an ever growing wave of protests, including 2,000 marching against cuts in October 2010, 3,000 students demonstrating during November 2010 and 4,000 striking workers marching on 30 June 2011.

The council's financial strategy leading up to 2015 shows a fall in central government funding by approximately one third or £43 million. All council departments have been asked to draw up scenarios of 5-15% cuts.

The Greens propose raising council tax by 3.5% to "protect as far as



Thousands of people have protested against cuts in Brighton photo Brighton SP

possible services for the most vulnerable" while still making cuts.

While the plan confirms the Green's commitment to a supposedly 'living wage' for council workers of £7.19, this is with a planned 0.5% pay increase in 2012/13 when 'general inflation' is anticipated to be 2%.

The Green plan also assumes a 10% cut in council tax benefit expenditure from April 2013.

Budget calculator

Public consultation has been on the theme of 'balance your own budget'. The assumption underlying the 'balanced budget calculator' is that a 'standstill' budget - protecting existing services - would be 6% 'over budget' and lead to a 17.1% council tax rise.

Against this background we are being asked to 'prioritise' services. Drawing up a budget which modestly increases all expenditure by 5%, results in a 32.2% increase in council tax.

Cutting ALL services by 5% would still mean a 2% council tax increase, it would be necessary to cut all children's services by a further 5% to balance the budget!

This approach could cause division between public and private sector workers, the unemployed

and employed, and between different council sectors and service users. How is this different from the tactics of the mainstream parties?

In answer to a Socialist Party member's question at one consultation meeting, an officer agreed that councillors would not face fines, imprisonment or bans from office for setting a 'needs budget'. At worst, they might be 'suspended' from office after investigation.

She argued, however, that there was a risk that local government minister Eric Pickles could 'impose' the cuts. Most participants seemed to agree that councillors should have been present to answer that question, and not hide behind officers.

Green crumble

Without a far-sighted strategy rooted in the organised strength of the working class, the Greens are crumbling in the face of government attacks.

Some Green Party members have been up in arms about the council strategy. A handful of Green Left members fought for a 'needs budget' strategy within Brighton Green Party.

Two Green Left members were local election candidates and signed the BSTCC pledge. One was elect-

ed, but quickly retreated from the pledge. The other resigned from the Green Party to support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

TUSC, which involves the Socialist Party, trade unionists and other left groups, opposes all cuts. The money is there. As the PCS union has shown, the very rich avoid paying £120 billion in tax every year.

For more anti-cuts reports and analysis go to

www.socialistparty.org.uk

TUSC demands progressive tax on rich corporations and individuals, with a crackdown on tax avoidance. This would have to be alongside bringing the banks, finance institutions and other major companies that dominate the economy, into genuine public ownership under democratic control.

The movement against the cuts is growing and could unite behind a council refusing to make any cuts, but the Greens refuse to give that lead.

See brightonhovesocialistparty.blogspot.com for a longer version of this article

London trade unionists support electoral opposition to cuts

Trade unionists are supporting the call for anti-cuts election candidates in the 2012 London assembly elections.

"We, the undersigned, support the call for trade unionist and socialist candidates to stand in the Greater London Assembly elections in 2012, committed to opposing all cuts, privatisation and PFI"

New signatories, all in a personal capacity, include:

Ellie Evans Unison; Stephan Kimmerle ver.di; Danny Garlaschelli Unison; Jane Ellwood Unison; Alejandro Adame-Basilio Prospect; Ben Robinson Unite; Susan Wills UCU; Steve Poole RMT; Martin Reynolds Unite

To add your name to the statement go to www.tusc.org.uk or email jjpreidie@yahoo.co.uk

Kazakhstan: Demand Georgii Epshtein's release!

CWI Reporters
Kazakhstan

There is new evidence that the Kazakh authorities' charges against Russian Committee for a Workers' International member Georgii Epshtein have been completely fabricated.

Georgii was sentenced to ten days detention for "breaching the rules for staying in Kazakhstan". Migration police claimed that Pashaev Magamed had given evidence that Georgii was living in his flat.

Pashaev is actually the landlord of an office currently rented by the Leave People's Homes Campaign.

Supporters of Socialist Movement Kazakhstan (SMK) contacted Pashaev Magamed by telephone. He

declared that he had not given any evidence, nor had he made a statement. He said that he did not even know who Georgii was and had never seen him.

10 days in prison from false evidence

The trial itself was full of breaches of procedure. Georgii, "the accused", was not given the right to use a defence lawyer. Witnesses who spoke in his support were ignored.

The judge ignored the absence of a written protocol, which should have been written at the time of ar-



Georgii Epshtein (left), and state officials

rest, and nor was Pashaev called to give evidence in person.

Although by law, a Russian citizen has to register with the police on their arrival, which Georgii did, there is no restriction on where in the city they can be at any one time. It seems that Georgii has been im-

prisoned for being a CWI member.

Georgii is being denied his right to appeal the sentence as, to do so, he has to be given a written copy of the court's decision and to date the copy is being kept under lock and key by the court's staff.

Please send messages of protest

to the London Kazakhstan embassy on 020 7590 3490 and/or london@kazembassy.org.uk, the prosecutor general in Kazakhstan on gp-rk@prokuror.kz and the ministry of foreign affairs on midrk@mfa.kz.

See www.socialistworld.net for more