

The British Greens: A party of cuts and austerity

Of Danny Dickinson, Socialist Equality Party (UK) candidate in St. Helens Town Centre ward
25 April 2012

“Imagine a party that creates jobs, rather than dishing out cuts.”

So runs the Green Party’s election broadcast. The two-and-a-half-minute presentation depicts a number of children “imagining” how things could be different, if only people would vote Green.

Fortunately (but not for the Greens who are one of my opponents in the St. Helens Town centre ward), we do not have to imagine. We only have to look to their record running Brighton and Hove City Council—their political flagship.

Following the election of party leader Caroline Lucas as the Member of Parliament for Brighton Pavilion in 2010, the Greens became the largest party on the council in 2011, where they currently head a minority administration.

In February 2012, the council adopted a cuts budget, with all but one Green councillor voting in favour. On his blog, Jason Kitcat, Green Party councillor and Cabinet member responsible for Finance & Central Services, wrote that “some services will be reduced, fees will go up, efficiencies will be found”.

In the new budget, a reduction in central government funding to the local authority of £10.5 million and the increased cost of providing existing services £7.2 million are more than offset by a reduction of £19.9 million through “efficiency and other savings”. This is a code word for further cuts in jobs and services following those already introduced by the previous Conservative City Council, which were not reversed by the Greens.

The council has yet to spell out what this means concretely, but the local paper, the *Argus*, reported at the end of last year, “Brighton and Hove City Council will cut up to 120 job posts in the next year as it looks to make more than £17 million of savings,” a figure

that has proved to be an underestimate.

Apart from spending on housing, which falls from £72.8 million in 2011-2012 to £59.6 million in 2012-2013, the education budget drops by £2 million; refuse collection by £1.5 million; leisure, parks and open spaces by £1.3 million; and libraries, museums and tourism by £0.7 million.

The council is seeking to boost its income by pushing up rents for council housing—raising an additional £2.4 million—and through increasing other “fees, charges and rents” by £5.3 million.

The new budget is meant to set a trend for the future, with council leader Bill Randall saying, “We intend to save £20 million over the next three years”.

These savage cuts being imposed by the Greens in Brighton and Hove pale when placed next to those their party colleagues have imposed in Ireland. In government with the right-wing Fianna Fail from 2007 to 2011, the Green Party shares responsibility for imposing the most draconian austerity measures ever seen in the Irish republic.

The 2011 budget drawn up by the Fianna Fail-Green coalition government was the fourth such to bear the Greens’ signature. The cuts have fallen most heavily on the poor and low-paid, who are being punished for the criminal speculation of the banks. A total of €780 million was slashed from the welfare system, with benefit payments cut by roughly 5 percent. Income tax adjustments will bring an additional €1 billion in revenues, taken directly out of the pockets of low- and average-paid workers. Pensions have been cut and university fees raised.

In Germany, before they became a party of government, the Greens were fond of proclaiming their pacifism and opposition to war. On demonstrations against the first Gulf War in 1991, party leader Joschka

Fischer would shout, “No blood for oil!” Then, in 1999, when in government with the Social Democratic Party, the Greens supported the NATO bombing of Serbia, which killed hundreds of innocent Serbs and destroyed much of the country’s infrastructure. In 2001, the Greens voted to send German troops to Afghanistan. By the second Gulf War in 2003, the Greens had completely abandoned their former pacifism, voting for American forces to be able to use German bases to launch their murderous attacks.

The German Greens continue to move to the right and are contemplating the conservative Christian Democratic Union as possible coalition partners following next year’s general election. Baden-Württemberg state premier Winfried Kretschmann, the first Green to head a state government, recently told *Der Tagesspiegel* that while a coalition with the Social Democrats was the preferred option, the Green Party should not rule out forming a coalition with Angela Merkel’s Christian Democrats in 2013.

The English Greens are all too willing to enter coalitions with Labour, which is busy ramming through cuts wherever it holds office. In Brighton, when it emerged as the largest party, its first reaction was to seek a coalition with the Labour Party. In London, the Green Party has told its supporters to give their second-preference votes to Labour mayoral candidate Ken Livingstone. In his last administration, Livingstone also enjoyed the support of the Greens, who filled the deputy mayor position.

The Greens describe themselves as “the party of hope and radical change”. But they are a pro-business party, as committed as all the rest to preserving capitalist profit relations.

The only party that will live up to the promise to create jobs, rather than dishing out cuts, is the Socialist Equality Party. I urge you to support our campaign and to help build the SEP.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact