

UK local elections: “The ill are being coerced, manipulated, into doing something they are not capable of”

Stephen Woodbridge
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Stephen Woodbridge, Socialist Equality Party candidate for Peterborough Bretton North, spoke to John Cyngier.

John had a heart attack in 2005 and underwent heart bypass surgery in 2011. Ever since he has been fighting to protect his social benefits from the Conservative-Liberal Democrats' efforts to force the ill and disabled back to work by cutting benefits.

John explained:

The DWP [Department of Work and Pensions] said that my Incapacity Benefit will be cut from £156.75 a week to £111.45 a week. So I queried it.

I was asked to go for an incapacity assessment. I don't know if the people doing the tests are from the government or health care professionals. I was asked about my medication. Had I known they would ask me this, I would have brought my medicines with me. I was able to remember most of the medicines, but not the dosages. I thought this information would be on their records, as already sent.

I found the whole thing horrendous and do not understand why the GP's and consultants' findings and reports are not used, which would eliminate the need for people suffering from serious medical conditions having to go through this.

I would like to know what are the qualifications of these assessors? Who is now responsible for my health medically and clinically—doctors or politicians? Why do these assessors only look at the mobility aspect, not the medical and clinical reports?

This month, I got a letter saying my benefit was being cut to £71 per week, a cut of 70 percent. It said I could appeal against this. While the appeal was being heard, I was led to believe that my benefit would remain as normal.

So I sent in my appeal as soon as I could, because you only have 30 days to do this. Because of my condition I get tired very easily and it took me two days to write the appeal.

I phoned them to make sure my appeal had been received and was told the appeals procedure could take three to six months. The cuts will start to hit me from next month. Next month I will be in trouble. It is scandalous to cut my benefit while I am on an appeal.

I was told to go to the Job Centre and claim Job Seekers Allowance. I said that as they are aware I am not fit for work, I should not be claiming Job Seekers Allowance and to do so would be making a false claim.

I cannot manufacture my condition. That's on my record. I am on medication and have had angiograms done.

It took this department three to six months to address these issues. Why does it take so long? These things should be dealt with quickly and efficiently. People like me who are making legitimate complaints should not have to deal with all this bureaucracy.

After working from the age of 17 to 53 when I had a heart attack, I deserve to be treated fairly. The ill are now being coerced, manipulated, into doing something they are not capable of.

People like me, with a heart condition, and others who are genuinely ill or infirm, should not forcibly be declared fit for work, especially when 2.5 million able-bodied people are unemployed. What hope would the

disabled have of finding work? In Peterborough recently 2,000 people applied for 25 jobs. There is no work out there.

In April 2005, when I came home from hospital after having heart failure, I enquired about a reduction in my Council Tax because of disablement. After waiting two hours and filling in loads of forms, I was later told they had already assessed my Council Tax even though they received my paperwork within the time limit.

When the government bailed out the banks it was the taxpayers who funded it. Even so we don't get a say in how they are run. The government didn't even stop the bankers paying themselves huge bonuses. While working people pay their taxes—even I, on Incapacity Benefit and a small pension, still pay tax—the large corporations do everything they can to avoid paying their dues.

I agree with a lot of what you say. We should never have privatised our utilities because all the privatisations are a disgrace. We need a revolution. For a long time this country has needed a revolution. I can understand the need for a party for working people all over the world.



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