

UK Green Party helps impose cuts in Bristol

Richard Duckworth
17 April 2013

In May's council elections in Bristol, the Green Party will contest each of the 23 wards at stake, hoping to increase the number of its councillors from the present two.

The party likes to present itself as a particularly radical exponent of Green politics. Its candidate in Easton, Anna McMullen, asserts, "Greens across Bristol have a track record of standing up for what matters... We are activists who are willing to speak up to protect public services, oppose the cuts, and make sure local voices get heard."

The Greens' real track record once in power, in Britain and across Europe, is one of junking opposition to cuts in a bid to reassure the various financial institutions and banks they will implement austerity measures.

In May 2012 a referendum was held in Bristol (population 433,000) to determine whether the city should have a directly elected mayor, who would govern with an appointed cabinet of up to seven councillors, to replace the system of a leader elected by councillors.

During the referendum campaign, "local democracy campaigner and Green party activist" Rob Telford insisted, "I am very concerned that a mayoral campaign and the resulting mayor would be open only to those who are rich enough to run a presidential style campaign. We should bring politics back down to the human scale by devolving more decision-making to neighbourhood partnerships."

Some 41,032 people voted to have a mayor and 35,880 voted against the idea, a total of some 24 percent of the electorate.

In its manifesto for the mayoral election that followed in November 2012, the Green Party declared, "We do not agree with the logic of cutting public spending at a time of recession," and pledged it would "fight for Bristol resources."

However, the party was already indicating to the establishment that it would be prepared to "dish out" cuts, promising to "exercise care to minimise the damage of the cuts on the most vulnerable."

Within weeks of that statement, Guy Hoyt, the Green Party councillor for the Ashley area of the city, "gladly accepted" the opportunity to advance his political career by joining the "rainbow cabinet" of newly elected mayor, George Ferguson, a decision unanimously endorsed by the local Green Party.

In the 1970s Ferguson was the first Liberal to be elected to the city council, a Labour stronghold for decades. Aware that his campaign for mayor would go nowhere if he stood as a representative for the much hated Liberal Democrats, Ferguson resigned his membership from that party in May 2012, shortly before announcing he would stand as an Independent.

Ferguson, with the backing of his cabinet of Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Green councillors, proceeded to publish his budget proposals for 2013-2014, outlining £35 million in cuts. The Labour Party has refused to participate in the cabinet so far, feigning opposition to cuts that councils run by Labour elsewhere have carried out.

As a result of Ferguson's budget, at least 330 workers will lose their jobs, many compulsorily, services will be slashed and council tax increased by £30 a year—coinciding with benefit cuts to people in and out of work. This comes on top of £56 million of cuts in the previous two years. The cuts being implemented by Ferguson amount to 9 percent of the council's annual budget, with plans for further cuts of £100 million to be made by 2015.

In an interview with the local media, Hoyt brazenly demonstrated that the Green's manifesto promises were not worth the paper they were written on. While attempting to portray the "rainbow cabinet" as a "positive and innovative new direction" and an

alternative to the “ancient ideas of confrontational politics” at Westminster, he promoted the well-worn lie that there was “no alternative but to accept the financial situation which has been imposed upon us. Savings of £34m have to be found, but I will do my best to ameliorate the effects on the most vulnerable.”

“Clearly this is not a position I ever wanted to be in, but with power comes responsibility. We have to rise to this challenge and put the needs of the people of the city before short-term political gain,” Hoyt pleaded.

Hoyt says that the Green Party’s collaboration in implementing public spending cuts in Bristol is an opportunity to “send an important message to other cities around the country and Europe.”

But an important message has already been sent by the Greens elsewhere—that wherever they come to power, they rapidly drop their opposition to cuts and war. Hoyt has gone down that same road.

In 2010, Green Party leader and Westminster MP Caroline Lucas declared there was “no good reason for any cuts in public expenditure during the life of this parliament.” This message was reinforced during the May 2012 council elections, which led to Hoyt’s election as a councillor. A Green Party television broadcast asked voters to “Imagine a party that creates jobs, rather than dishing out cuts.” Children popped up on the screen, dramatising how life would be so much better, if only people supported the Greens.

In Brighton and Hove, where the Green Party is the largest party and heads a minority administration, the council has implemented nearly £20 million in cuts resulting in 120 job losses, services being slashed and rents for council housing raised.

In Germany, the Greens, in government with the Social Democratic Party from 1999, supported the NATO bombing of Serbia and voted to send German troops to Afghanistan and to allow US forces to use German bases to launch the war in Iraq. The Greens were central to the imposition of the infamous Hartz IV reforms, which created a poverty-wage sector in Germany.

In Ireland, in government with the right-wing Fianna Fail from 2007 to 2011, the Green Party shared responsibility for imposing the most draconian austerity measures ever seen in the Irish republic, punishing the poor and low-paid for the criminal speculation of the banks.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact