

The rotten record of the UK Green Party

David O'Sullivan
7 May 2015

The Green Party headed by Natalie Bennett, who I am standing against in Holborn and St Pancras, parade themselves as the anti-austerity voice of the people.

The party's manifesto trumpets, "Imagine a political system that puts the public first. Imagine an economy that gives everyone their fair share. Imagine a society capable of supporting everyone's needs. Imagine a planet protected from the threat of climate change now and for the generations to come."

Bennett and I have participated in several hustings in the course of the election campaign, although I have to say the leader of a party that claims to want to revive local democracy was noticeably silent during my successful appeal to appear on the platform on at least two occasions when I was initially excluded.

During the hustings, I have challenged Bennett about the record of Green parties once they get into government. I have warned audiences that Green parties worldwide are synonymous with spectacular renunciations of their supposed principles. Policies advocated, perhaps for decades, are dropped within hours of entering government. In return for some minor adjustments of environmental policy, Greens have assumed responsibility for aggressively advancing the interests of their own ruling elite.

In Germany in 1998, the Greens entered into a coalition with the Social Democrats to form a government at the federal level. Green Party Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer was in the forefront of the campaign for the first international combat mission by the German army since the Second World War—as part of the NATO bombardment of Serbia.

In Ireland, the Green Party formed a coalition with Fianna Fail in 2007, which responded to the global financial crisis the following year by imposing successive punitive emergency budgets. These measures, designed to pay for state bailouts of the banks, led to wage and benefit cuts, tax hikes and large-

scale redundancies for broad sections of working people.

In January this year, Syriza (The Coalition of the Radical Left), was elected as the Greek government, with the support of the Green Party's co-thinkers, the Ecologist Greens, promising to end austerity. Three months later, the party has become the key instrument for finance capital to continue imposing social cuts on the working class.

Bennett's stock answer has been to declare that she is the head of the Green Party of England and Wales and therefore not responsible for what happens abroad.

But what exactly has been the record of the Green Party of England and Wales in the councils in which they gained control or received substantial support in the last council elections?

Readers may remember the 2012 party election broadcast on behalf of the Green Party. It depicted a number of well-presented children with happy smiling faces also "imagining" how things could be different, if only people voted Green. Like today, voters were asked to "Imagine a party that creates jobs, rather than dishing out cuts."

Three years later, what has become of all that imagining? What has become of the Green vision of anti-austerity, social justice, equality and harmony?

In Brighton and Hove, the Greens became the largest party in the City Council with 23 elected members. It ran a minority administration, collaborating with both the Conservatives and Labour on a vote-by-vote basis. Within months, Brighton and Hove City Council adopted a cuts budget, with all but one Green councillor voting in favour of cuts to services and an increase in council tax.

Jason Kitcat, the then-Green Party councillor and Cabinet member responsible for Finance & Central Services at Brighton and Hove City Council, declared that as a result of the 2012 budget, "some services will

be reduced, fees will go up, efficiencies will be found.”

He boasted to the *Argos* that these measures proved that “Greens deliver.”

For his role in presiding over the cuts and increasing council tax, Kitcat was rewarded by being elected leader of the City Council.

The Greens’ commitment “to deliver” has been far reaching. They have imposed a staggering 11 percent increase in Council Tax since 2012, while implementing cuts of up to £37 million, including pay cuts of up to £4,000 for some of the council’s refuse workers, which provoked a strike.

The cuts to public services, working conditions and wages imposed by Brighton and Hove City Council’s Green Party members are not unique. In 2012, the new Mayor of Bristol, George Ferguson, who ran as an independent, claimed to have a mandate as a result of being elected to the post on a 12 percent vote. The role of deputy mayor with responsibility for housing was offered by Ferguson to Bristol Green Party councillor Gus Hoyt. Hoyt, unanimously backed by Bristol’s Green Party, willingly accepted the £32,000 a year post, only later to complain of receiving low pay for his services to the people of Bristol.

Ferguson and Hoyt have presided over £91 million in cuts to jobs and services across Bristol City Council. The cuts have affected jobs and support services for victims of domestic violence, those seeking recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, the disabled, adults with mental health issues, homelessness services, day care for the elderly and others. The cuts to the homelessness prevention budget are set at 40 percent, with 20 percent of the cuts already implemented over the last three years.

Remember that Hoyt is deputy mayor with responsibility for housing.

Local homelessness charity Emmaus has revealed Bristol has witnessed a 90 percent increase in homelessness since 2012. A brief stroll around the city centre is all that is needed to see the scale of the homelessness crisis now unfolding.

Hoyt and Ferguson have together sought to force the council to drop its no-eviction policy for those council tenants affected by the bedroom tax.

In 2014, prior to Hoyt resigning from his post after swearing at a member of the public, he bought a council house for £186,000 that was deemed to be

surplus to requirements. When questioned, Hoyt claimed he did not know the house belonged to the council as he entered into a blind auction to secure it. Liberal Democrat councillors, speaking to the *Bristol Post*, allege that “he knew earlier in the year because he was sent an email from the council’s housing services department which informed him of plans to sell the house.”

In a statement on the party’s website, Hoyt wrote, “I knew someone, somewhere would probably try and make up a story about ‘the local corrupt Green Councillor’ and almost withdrew from the process.”

He resisted the temptation to do so and succeeded in purchasing the house.

The Green Party’s promises, such as they are, count for very little. They are a pro-capitalist party and will do what is demanded of them by their fundamental underlying perspective based upon the demands of the profit system—and what they are told to do by the ruling class.

The only genuine anti-austerity vote in Holborn & St Pancras is for David O’Sullivan. The only alternative to the parties of big business is the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact