

UK: Pro-Corbyn councillors vote with Blairites against scrapping Haringey Council's social cleansing project

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Councillors supporting party leader Jeremy Corbyn have made a rotten deal with Labour's right wing over Haringey Council's hiving off land and other assets and destruction of social housing.

The Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) is a £2 billion privatisation project that transfers council assets from the London council to a holding company in partnership with the global private developer, Lendlease. Council housing is to be demolished and replaced by luxury developments and supposedly "affordable" properties that are out of the reach of most local residents.

The fight against the HDV was the flagship project of the pro-Corbyn Momentum campaign group. The pseudo-left presented it as the frontline in the battleground between the right and left. They proclaimed Haringey the epicentre of a fightback because most Blairite pro-HDV councillors have been deselected and replaced by Corbyn supporters as candidates in upcoming local elections in May.

However, at an emergency council meeting held on February 7, the fightback turned into an ignominious rout.

Hoping to salvage some credibility as opponents of the HDV, the small Liberal Democrat opposition proposed an emergency motion calling for the scheme to be scrapped. They declared, "For too long some Labour Councillors have talked the talk on stopping the HDV—it is now time for action. Let's see if they have the courage to turn up to the Extraordinary meeting and stand up and be counted."

A residents' group addressed the councillors. They gave some flavour of the depth of opposition to HDV declaring "council tenants know that Lendlease will not

build social housing" and that the company was "an unsuitable partner, following their social cleansing activities at the Heygate estate." This was a reference to the 1,200 social homes in South London that were replaced with expensive private apartments and just 82 new social homes.

"Residents feel excluded from regeneration plans—we will be no longer be able to live in the place we have called home for many years. There is no future for us or our children here. ... We feel cheated. The HDV will demolish our homes without asking if we want that. The London Borough of Haringey has allowed our estates to decline and is using this as a reason to knock them down."

Ignoring their pleas and shouts from the public gallery of "Looks like the HDV is not dead" and "Labour unity but locals betrayed," every single one of the 46 Labour councillors present voted against the motion.

If the 22 anti-HDV Labour councillors had voted with the eight Lib-Dems, the UK's most infamous handover of council assets to property developers would have been ended and a bitter blow dealt to Labour's right wing. Instead, they lined up behind an amendment proposed by Blairite council leader, Claire Kober, to postpone a "final decision on the set-up" of the HDV until a new administration is formed following the May elections.

To justify their capitulation, Momentum members said the Lib-Dems were just using the issue to split the Labour Party. In the next breath, they complained the anti-HDV councillors could not vote for the LibDem motion because they would face suspension if they defied the Labour whip. They claimed HDV was "dead

in the water” anyway, because Kober had “promised” not to sign the HDV deal with Lendlease before the May elections, when she intends to retire. Then there will be a new pro-Corbyn administration because most pro-HDV councillors have been deselected and replaced, and HDV can be halted then. All of which are the excuses offered by the unprincipled for their lack of principle.

Haringey sums up the role played by Momentum in disarming working class resistance with their claims that Corbyn’s leadership has transformed the Labour Party—and of the pseudo-left groups—the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Party (SP)—who act as apologists for their betrayals.

The SWP and SP insisted that the way to defeat the Kober administration was to win the support of “rebel” councillors in Haringey and deselect pro-HDV councillors.

On January 26, the SP, in response to the Lib-Dem’s publication of their proposed February 7 anti-HDV motion, advised councillors to vote in favour, saying, “Some anti-HDV activists have said that it is necessary to vote against the HDV in this council meeting. The Socialist Party agrees that if the anti-HDV councillors vote for the HDV scheme it will be seen as a betrayal of the expectations of hundreds and thousands of people ...

“With a Corbynista majority now on the Labour Party NEC and a Corbynista chair of the disputes committee, are Labour lefts really saying they can’t put up a fight against threats to expel them? If that was tried it would create uproar.”

The fighting talk was quickly dropped.

On February 7, the *Socialist* newspaper made no reference to the impending vote that evening or what the councillors should do. Moving onto next business, Paula Mitchell of the London Socialist Party declared, “now’s our chance for a no-cuts council.”

Instead, Mitchell enthused how the “crucial question of what a Corbyn council should do was debated at Haringey Labour Party’s manifesto conference on 4 February”—at which she said motions were passed committing the council to stopping the HDV!

Within a couple of paragraphs Mitchell showed just how unlikely is the chance of a “no-cuts council” emerging when she acknowledged that “the outgoing councillors have to agree the manifesto—leaving control in the hands of the deselected, discredited right wing.”

Proof of the readiness of the “Corbynistas” to leave control in the hands of the right-wing did not need to wait until May. It was on full display the day Mitchell’s fluff piece was published.

As for the SWP, they ran a piece following the latest debacle complaining of how a “grassroots campaign” had pushed the HDV to “the brink of defeat.” However, Labour councillors had “squandered the chance to bury a high-profile redevelopment deal and to strike a blow against social cleansing.”

“The left councillors had a choice between manoeuvres inside Labour and loyalty to the movement that has broken the HDV. They turned their back on the movement.”

Not one word of explanation or apology was offered by the SWP as to their own role in boosting Haringey’s “left” councillors, along with Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party nationally.

The role of the Corbynites in rescuing HDV in order to preserve unity is the real measure of the relationship of “left” and “right” in the Labour Party and a sign of things to come throughout the UK.

Scores of other Labour controlled councils are pursuing similar privatisation and social cleansing policies to Haringey. Following the call by Labour’s pro-Corbyn majority National Executive Committee for Haringey Council to “pause” the HDV and take part in “mediation” talks, 68 of the 123 Labour council leaders sent a joint letter to the *Sunday Times* condemning its intervention as “an affront to the basic principles of democracy” and describing Kober as “inspirational.”

At a meeting last weekend of the same council leaders, Corbyn pleaded with them to see the HDV as a “unique” situation and stressed that he had no wish to interfere.



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