

New “Corbyn council” in Haringey, London demands more cuts

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Haringey Council, in north London, has just advised local Labour Party members that it will “have to” cut its budget by a further 10 percent, or £14 million.

This is standard operational procedure for Labour-run councils, who impose cuts on behalf of the central Conservative government in all the major urban centres they administer. The difference with Haringey is that it is run by supporters of supposed austerity opponent Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

The self-styled “Corbyn council” is imposing the cuts on top of 40 percent cuts imposed by their Blairite predecessors. The letter to Labour Party members came from Joseph Ejiofor, a supporter of the pro-Corbyn Momentum group, who was elected council leader after the Corbynites took control in the local election in May.

Following the election, Ejiofor told press, “Over the next four years, it will be up to us to show everybody what this mythical beast the Corbyn council does.”

The Corbynites were elected in the wake of the massive public opposition to the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV). The scheme, put in place by the Blairites around then-leader Claire Kober, would have seen the transfer of an unprecedented £2 billion worth of social assets to HDV, a 50-50 council partnership with private developer Lendlease. Under the proposed redevelopment, 1,400 council homes across seven estates would have been demolished and replaced by luxury developments and a small percentage of supposedly “affordable” properties.

Residents’ reaction was furious. Many of the scheme’s advocates were deselected by their party branches. Although unable to stand in the forthcoming elections, they pushed through the scheme at their last full meeting. This was only possible thanks to their “left” opponents in Momentum, who had been selected

as candidates because of their stated opposition to HDV. They absented themselves from this decisive meeting so as not to clash with the Blairites, who were able to carry HDV by two votes.

Kober subsequently quit, taking a lucrative post as director of housing at housing management group Pinnacle. Her deputy was Ejiofor, a member of Momentum’s national co-ordinating group. Prior to joining Haringey in 2010, he had spent 12 years as a councillor in Newham, east London, under Blairite mayor Sir Robin Wales. Councillor Zena Brabazon was the choice of a clear majority of local Labour Party ward branch delegates for leader, because of her more consistent opposition to HDV, but Ejiofor was elected leader on the vote of councillors. Also on May’s electoral slate was Emina Ibrahim, now Ejiofor’s deputy, and Momentum’s national vice chair.

Ejiofor was at pains to explain before the election that Momentum posed no fundamental challenge to Labour’s right-wing, as being party loyalists, “there is no such thing as a [sic] Momentum councillors or candidates on Haringey Council, only Labour councillors.” But given the hostility to HDV, as a part of wider opposition to social cleansing being imposed mainly by Labour-run boroughs in the capital, Labour had little choice but to go into May’s elections pledging “not...to progress with” HDV. Despite this, Ejiofor was still saying after his appointment that the “decision has not been predetermined.”

When the council finally decided to abandon HDV—at a cost of £2.45 million, plus around £250,000 spent fighting the judicial review brought by its opponents and a further £520,000 in costs to Lendlease, which is now also seeking reimbursement for the full cost of works undertaken—it did so while trying to salvage the idea of commercial involvement in construction. Its

concern about the transfer of public assets into private and corporate hands was chiefly one of scale. The end of HDV therefore did not remove the threat of social cleansing.

The proposed redevelopment of the land around Seven Sisters underground station is a useful example. Much is owned by property developer Grainger, which was appointed as the council's development partner in 2004. Grainger proposed demolishing the existing "Latin Village" indoor market, a popular community hub. Its plans include building around 200 homes, none at council rent. As with HDV, there is widespread local hostility to the proposed gentrification, which was agreed by Kober's administration. At a meeting this summer, Labour members voted to halt the demolition and preserve the market as a "community asset." But once again, the Momentum council is carrying out the decisions of the previous administration.

The experiences of workers and youth with the new Haringey council stand as a devastating exposure of the pseudo-left groups, who claimed that all that was required to turn the tide against austerity was the election of a council of Corbynites. In a November 14 article in the Socialist Party (SP) newspaper, *Socialist*, Nick Auvache writes, "When socialists stood as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates in the local elections this year, we said we wanted to work with Corbyn-supporting councillors to defeat the cuts and kick out the privateers."

The article, "Haringey's 'Corbyn council' must refuse to make cuts!", only called on the council to spend from its unallocated reserves "to buy time" for a campaign to force the return of council funding. The approach, writes Auvache, "would be greatly strengthened if John McDonnell committed the next Labour government to replenishing reserves and underwriting all debts incurred by councils opposing cuts." This "could spearhead a national fight and help bring a swift end to the Tory government."

The Socialist Party is keen to exonerate Corbyn and McDonnell from any culpability. If Haringey "inflicts £23 million further cuts and misery," Auvache writes, "it is that which will discredit the Labour left in Haringey and the Corbyn project nationally."

The Socialist Party is fully aware of the statements of Ejiofor and McDonnell that make clear both are committed to enforcing austerity. In September, Ejiofor

told BBC *Radio 4*, "As a Labour council we have to balance our budget." While they prepared their manifesto, he said, "John McDonnell came to Haringey, talked to Haringey Labour Party members and explicitly expressed to them that it is important that we run a prudent, responsible authority."

This was nothing but McDonnell personally enforcing his and Corbyn's previous written instruction to Labour councils that they had to continue imposing balanced budgets—i.e., cuts—or face the possibility of legal action and intervention by the secretary of state.

Ejiofor told the BBC: "This is not Militant in the 1980s, right?" This was a reference to Militant, the predecessor of the SP, which sought to keep large sections of left-moving workers within the confines of Labour, building support in Liverpool by rejecting the spending cuts demanded by the Thatcher Conservative government. It attempted to present this as the development of organs of "dual power," but having secured an additional £30 million in loans, Militant carried out what it called an "orderly retreat" and produced a legally balanced budget. Militant's capitulation, and refusal to open up a second front alongside miners fighting for their jobs in the yearlong 1984-1985 strike, paved the way for the rout that swept them from office and the escalation of the right-wing witch-hunt of their members out of the Labour Party.

Despite the anti-austerity credentials of Corbyn's supporters being exposed within months of them taking office, the Socialist Party remains determined to enforce illusions in these scoundrels, declaring, "It is not too late for the council to change course. Such a campaign would show that Labour under Corbyn is serious about doing what is needed to end austerity."

Those workers and youth who saw Corbyn's Labour as a genuine vehicle for social change must study these developments carefully. Corbyn and McDonnell, despite the anti-austerity rhetoric they spout, lead a party that defends the capitalist system at all costs.



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