

Hackney Independent

Newsletter of the Hackney Independent Working Class Association - Autumn 2001

LEFT TO ROT!

Councillors abandon Hoxton and Haggerston

Do you know who your local councillors are? When was the last time they asked you what you thought about anything? Do they know - or even care - what most people in Hackney think are the important issues affecting our lives?

Haggerston Pool lies decaying with an undecided future because Hackney councillors voted for its closure. Local people fought to keep it open and the fight continues. Meanwhile new private gyms open up for those who can afford them.

HIT LIST

Across the Borough public buildings and spaces are being closed and left to rot or sold off to the private sector. As we reported in our last issue a hit-list has been drawn up by councillors. Those who depend most on these resources - Hackney's working class majority- are being asked to sacrifice them to bail out the middle-class councillors and chief officers who created the mess in the first place. In fact we are not even being "asked".

We can't afford the rents on the new flats being built around here - like the £200 a week flats on Cremer Street. But the Council prefers to let these flats be built rather than build flats at rents we can afford.

We can't afford the fees charged by private nurseries, but the Council closes down the council nurseries and jacks up the fees at the ones they keep open. The council

have effectively abandoned a major source of support to families struggling to stay in work.

Hackney IWCA have launched a survey across seventeen estates in the area. When we ask people what concerns they have about their local area crime and anti-social behaviour and lack of facilities are the top of the list. Do our elected councillors know this? And if so, do they care? They do nothing about crime and are actively involved in making sure the facilities we do have are closed down or sold off. Abandoned and burnt out cars, muggings and vandalism are common-place. Quality of life on our estates is not a priority for them. They think that a new café society for the Town Hall square is much more deserving of regeneration funding.

OUT OF TOUCH

Councillors are out of touch with the majority of us. As far as they are concerned, we can be left to rot. Instead of asking us what we need, the people we vote for just go ahead and do what they want - with our money. Labour, Lib Dem and Tory councillors do not represent working class interests. We need our own independent representation.

Want to see the council's hitlist of buildings and open space that they plan to sell?

Phone us on 07000 752 752, leave your details and we'll send you a copy.



ABANDONED 1

Cars vandalised and dumped on our estates while the council carry out less and less repairs and cleaning. Will the council ever fulfil its responsibilities?



ABANDONED 2

Haggerston Pool closed down for over a year while new Stoke Newington leisure complex goes massively over budget. Will the pool ever re-open?



ABANDONED 3

Apples and Pears playground - first funding cut and now proposals for flats built on it. Will our kids have any facilities left?

Hit the council where it hurts! See back page.

“GETTING RESULTS”

Carl Taylor lives in Haggerston and is a leading member of the IWCA. The Hackney Independent asked him about his involvement.

Why did you join the IWCA?

Because the IWCA is trying to improve the area where I live, which has been consistently neglected by the authorities. I couldn't see anyone else doing anything about it.

There's a real ideological push to privatise and basically redistribute resources in this area from the working class to the middle and business classes. The IWCA understands this. The main political parties understand it as well, of course, because they're either actively encouraging it - like Labour and the Tories - or cannot be trusted to put up a fight - like the Lib Dems.

What kind of things have you done in the IWCA?

The best activities have been talking to people and trying to get improvements on our estates. This has been through things like going door-to-door with surveys, lobbying the New Deal for money to make blocks safer and doing the surgeries to help people get their benefits. Either way you can see that it is possible to make a difference - getting results. Most of the time decisions are being made behind closed doors over which we think we have no control. If you can demonstrate that ordinary people can influence those decisions in our own interests it sets a good example.

You were a leading campaigner against ITNet. Why did you get involved in that campaign?

Because the Housing Benefit problem was affecting so many people in our community. People were being evicted or harassed or worried about rent arrears. As well as getting involved with Whose Benefit? - which did a lot of good work publicising the real extent of the crisis and organised some very good public meetings - the IWCA published a help-line and set up some local Benefit surgeries to give people advice and reassurance.

Why did the Council give the contract to ITNet?

Because all the parties on the Council - Labour, Lib Dems and the Tories - support privatisation. The housing benefit system wasn't working very well. They could have put more resources into it, made it more efficient and got the staff working better. Instead they privatised it. They believe that a private company can do the job cheaper and still

make a profit out of it. And when it all went wrong, they tried to pass the buck and say it's not the Council's fault, it's all down to ITNet.

Why didn't they sort the problem out sooner?

For two reasons. First they believe in privatisation and so wanted to prove that it works. And secondly because our middle class councillors and senior officers are so out of touch with how the majority of us live that they didn't understand how big a problem it was. In the end they only took the contact back because it was costing them money - not because people were suffering.

What do you think are the major issues in Haggerston?

It's not what I think is important, it's the views of the local community that count. And apart from the IWCA no-one else seems to be trying to find the

views out.

The people I talk to mostly complain about lack of repairs and cleaning, anti-social behaviour - abandoned cars, mugging, drug dealing on our estates. But also housing privatisation - the service Pinnacle provides to tenants where they have taken over and where estates have been sold to Canalside. There are always rumours around about what is going to happen to this estate or that block but there's no real consultation. So accountability is also a big issue. All the big discussions about housing and the local environment should be out in the open.

What do you think the role of a councillor should be?

To listen to and represent the interests of their voters. Unfortunately, Town Hall and national party manifestos seem to take priority when it comes to most councillors. That's why they can't be trusted to do what they say when they're standing for election.

They might say they want to keep the local nursery, school or swimming pool open but once they get into the Town Hall they'll follow the party line.

One of the benefits of

the IWCA is that we haven't got an inflexible manifesto - we're committed to listening to the views of the working class majority. The middle-class minority are already over-represented in Hackney - who is going to represent the rest of us?

“ Anyone who has to visit relatives or has any other business in Finsbury or anywhere else in the charging area will have to pay £5 a day.

Even if you drive in by accident you still have to pay! So after paying your road tax and any parking fees to Hackney Council you still can't drive a few minutes from your house without getting another charge - and then you will still have to pay on a meter when you reach where you are going!

(continued on page 4)

A Bridge Too Far?

Local Activists Expose Developers' Plans

Fast work by community leaders in Haggerston has stopped the New Deal plan to put a bridge through Laburnum estate. But why would a new bridge be built over the canal in Haggerston that no-one wants?

This could only happen in the mad world of the Shoreditch New Deal, in partnership with the Canal-side Developers who have taken over Whitmore, parts of Haggerston estate and want to expand further.

The New Deal is meant to be “community-led.” In reality it is and has always been consultant led. The people who get the most benefit out of the New Deal are the architects and consultants who are taking huge chunks out of the New Deal money to pursue their own projects. The worst offender is Levitt Bernstein, who last year targeted 822 homes in Shoreditch and produced estate agent style brochures describing their “attractive location” and called for most to be knocked down and some to have luxury penthouses on top! And for this they received over £600,000 of our money! This year they came back calling for a footbridge to run over the canal between the Laburnum and Stonebridge estates. No one wanted this apart from Levitt Bernstein and Carolyn Clark, a New Deal Project Manager.

As Laburnum estate tenant Eugene Francis, an elected New Deal Board member told the Hackney Independent “this is supposed to be a community led initiative. The New Deal Project Managers and the Master Planners Levitt Bernstein, work for and on behalf of our communities. This seems to have been forgotten. None of our communities have asked for this work to be undertaken.”



Tenant activist Eugene Francis and IWCA's Peter Sutton look at the planned route for the bridge

The bridge would have turned Laburnum estate from a quiet cul de sac into a mugger's paradise and bring noise and disruption through the estate, particularly if the Haggerston tube station opens in a few years time, the estate would be a cut through for everyone south of the canal.

Originally the plans showed the bridge being built through Laburnum Boat Club. Tenants opposed it, and Laburnum Boat Club chair Patrick Hammill persuaded Levitt Bernstein to move the bridge to Laburnum estate. This would have been quite easy for him as he is a senior partner in Levitt Bernstein!

Tenant leader Eugene Francis lead community opposition to the bridge and got the plans withdrawn. But for him the real issue is why this came up in the first place “Why are Levitts looking at proposals, which have already been dismissed, and putting them forward as New Deal initiatives? And, how much are they charging us for this useless piece of work? Who commissioned it and why? Also if this is supposed to be a consultation on what local people would like to see happen along the canal, why have they not asked local people first? Why, if this is an English Waterways project, was £100,000 of our New Deal money going to be spent on it?” More questions than the hapless New Deal Director Michael Pyner can answer. After all he's only on £60,000 a year to run the whole show.

IWCA co-ordinator Peter Sutton added “this really was a bridge too far”. But it is just one of many schemes put forward by New Deal officers, with no support in the community. The New Deal Officers have pushed for the closure of Burbage school, the demolition of Harwood Court, building a supermarket on Hoxton Gardens, and building a sixth from centre on Colville estate. All of these schemes were dreamt up behind closed doors and plans were being made until community activists found out and put a stop to them. Everyone should keep an eye on what the New Deal officers are up to.

It goes to show that it is the consultants who call the shots on the New Deal. The community is not in control. The best that we can do is to put a block on their crazy schemes, stop them from wasting our money and selling off our homes whilst continually pushing the issue of a complete refurbishment of every council home in the New Deal area. Now that's a way to spend New Deal money that we can all agree on.

Congestion Charges - who's gaining?

Ken Livingstone and the Labour-run Greater London Assembly plan to charge £5 to anyone who crosses Old Street or City Road in their car. Because we are just outside the area:

- “ More cars will be parked in Shoreditch .
- “ There will be more traffic in Shoreditch as cars try to avoid the charging area.

Labour Doesn't Represent Us

The majority of Hackney voters did not take part in the general election in June. This is no surprise because there was nothing for the majority of us to vote for. Nationally the Labour Government was elected with another huge majority - but only 25% of the electorate voted for them. And that was on the lowest turnout ever recorded. As new middle class voters have been attracted by Labour's pro big business policies - paid for by cuts in public spending - working class voters have stayed at home.

Labour pushes the same agenda locally as nationally. The Labour Party that privatises housing benefit and the dustbins in Hackney is the same Labour Party that won't take control of Railtrack and now wants to privatise the tube. Labour have announced that they want to see the end of council housing in ten years, and Hackney Labour have done everything they can to sell-off our estates, with the Borough's biggest estate, Woodberry Down in Stamford Hill, being their next target.

Labour are looking for the middle class vote. Twenty years ago our estates were covered in Labour posters during elections. Now there are hardly any posters up - but in private streets the bigger the house the more chance there is of a Labour poster.

There are reasons why so many new yuppie flats are being built around here. Look at the "glass-house" on Murray Grove, the yellow flats on Cremer Street or the new £220 a week flats in Haggerston Library. They are not for us. They are for the City workers and lawyers. Labour wants them to live in Hackney because they will turn out and vote for New Labour. These people aren't affected by the lack of repairs and cleaning on our estates, the lack of facilities for young people. They don't use the local buses, nurseries or advice centres. Labour wants them for two reasons. Because they will still vote Labour and because they don't mind the Council cutting all the local facilities. Because Labour represents them, we need independent working class candidates to represent working class interests.

We can't look to the Tories or Lib Dems to help us. The Tories have three councillors in Haggerston and Shoreditch and the Lib Dems have two. When did you see them and what have they done for you? Although they can both make some sense when they are in opposition, they have both had a go at running the Town Hall in recent years and fol-

lowed the same policy as Labour - cutting repairs, privatising services and selling off our estates.

Labour has the most councillors in Haggerston, Hoxton and De Beauvoir. What have they done for the area since they were elected three years ago? We have seen estates privatised, Haggerston Pool closed, all our local facilities threatened or closed down. Instead they have prioritised build-

ing flats for rich people and promoting the "night-time economy" - more trendy bars and restaurants in Hoxton Square and Curtain Road. Did you vote for that? There was a time when Labour was criticised for only coming round at elections. Now they and the other parties don't even do that. Labour can no longer claim to represent working class interests - in fact it has not even tried to do so for years.

And what was the result of June's election in Hackney? We are left with a Labour Council, two Labour MP's and no representation for the working class. Labour used to take the working class vote for granted - now they take it for granted that we won't vote, but that Hackney's middle class minority will turn out enough votes for Labour to get them back in. We have a chance to elect new councillors next May. Lets make sure there are no Labour councillors in Shoreditch or Haggerston after the local elections next year. **Labour doesn't represent us.**

"There was a time when Labour was criticised for only coming round at elections. Now they and the other parties don't even do that"

Government to take over Hackney?

Because of how bad things have got, the Government is thinking of taking over Hackney Council. At first this might seem like a good idea - to stop the incompetent councillors and senior officers making more of a mess. But when you think about what the national Labour government policies are - privatising the tube, PFI for hospitals, giving public services to private managers - then letting them run Hackney would only be a recipe for further privatisation here.

Instead the answer has to be to vote out all the sitting councillors in the local elections next May. The IWCA will be putting our own candidates forward and supporting other independent pro-working class candidates.



Two Labour MP's and two new Labour councillors were elected on June 7th. Let's try and wipe the smug smiles off their faces in next May's local elections.

WHERE'S THE MONEY GONE?

Part one: Clissold Leisure Centre

How could the Council have got us into such a mess? The Hackney Independent plans to look at a series of areas where the Council have - through incompetence or by pursuing their privatisation agenda at any cost - wasted our money and run up a huge debt. In this issue we look at the **Clissold Leisure Centre**.

The Leisure Centre is being built on Clissold Road, Stoke Newington by Clissold Park. It was meant to cost £7 million, but has so far cost the Council at least £16 million more than this. This £16 million could have been used to keep Haggerston Pool open, refurbish the Britannia, keep the Apples and Pears playground open and pay for a whole load more things.

PROBLEMS

Writing in Stoke Newington's N16 magazine, Ken Worpole reported that "although most of the building work is now completed, there are apparently still problems in controlling the quality of water - black algae has been seen on test runs and a large glass screen in the entrance foyer is causing problems in getting a fire rating. But even when these details are solved - and the taxi meter keeps ticking away, clocking up tens of thousands of pounds every month - final decisions have still to be made about the running of the centre, and what pricing and programming policies are to be adopted."



The new Clissold Leisure Centre

The Council won't manage the Leisure Centre, a private company will. Like with all Labour Party schemes, we put public money in and private sector managers come in and make a profit out of it. Ken Worpole calls it "the much-loved Railtrack model" although he could just as well call it the ITNet model.

The trendy design of the Leisure Centre - which will no doubt win awards for the architect - means that it will cost a fortune to maintain the building. And who will pick up the bill? The architects? The private sector managers? As usual it will be us - both through high ticket prices and through further Council subsidies.

PAY-OFFS

So who is to blame? As usual all the top Council officers who drew up the plans have now left - mainly with big pay-offs. The councillors will all blame each other - as Labour, Lib Dem and Tory councillors have run the Council at some point during the building work. You could say that the blame lies with all of us who have let them get away with it for so long.

And, seven years after the plans were drawn up, the Leisure Centre is still not open, and nor is Haggerston Pool. And the Council are still collecting our ever increasing rents and council tax every week and providing less and less for it.

Hit the council where it hurts

The case for a rent freeze.

For years the Council have been charging us more and giving us less. Think of your council tax, garage, home help, car space or rent and you know what I mean. But it is with the rent that we have a new weapon to hit the Council where it hurts – starting next April. If at least 1000 tenants say now that they will not pay any rent increase then we will get the Council worried. The councilors will all be up for election just five weeks after next year's increase come in. How many of them will want to put our rent up when they know that not only are we preparing not to pay it – but also that there are candidates standing in the elections who oppose all rent increases until we get a decent service?

Normal protests against the Council are things that they can ignore like petitions and lobbies of the Town Hall. Even when the Council workers go on strike it saves the Council a day's wages and gives them an excuse for having a disrupted service. The difference is that the rent freeze costs them money and they cannot ignore it.

You may have seen the orange posters and stickers already supporting the rent freeze. Lets cover the whole of the area in them before next April. The campaign is already supported by a number of tenant associations as well as the IWCA.

Lets put the boot on the other foot and hit them in the pocket for once!

How does it work?

1. We are trying to get 1000 tenants to register with the rent freeze campaign that they will not pay any rent increase next year. No-one should stop paying until they are informed that there are 1000 people registered.
2. Put the money you are not paying the Council into a bank account. If you do not have one, you can set up a credit union account by walking into the Credit Union office on Hoxton Market.
3. If the rent increase is £2, it would take at least a year for you to get two weeks behind with the rent and so for the Council to send you the first warning letter. By then we would hope to have thousands more tenants supporting the campaign.

How can you help the rent freeze campaign?

- Get in touch to register your support
- If your tenant association have not yet supported the campaign, get the campaign invited to speak to the next meeting
- Help us to spread the campaign – can you knock on some doors in your block with us to help get more people involved?
- If you want more information about the campaign write to **Tenants Fightback**, PO Box 3519, London, E8 4XW or leave a message on 07623 758 782 (40p per minute).



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www.hackneyiwca.fsnet.co.uk email:2002@hackneyiwca.fsnet.co.uk

Hackney IWCA was set up to involve and represent the interests of the working class majority in the borough. Since the mainstream political parties all represent middle class interests we thought we had to start standing up for ourselves. We are committed to finding out about the issues that are important on our estates and getting something done about them. Since the last newsletter we have carried out surveys on 9 separate estates asking tenants what they want sorting out. We have also continued our campaigns to get proper refurbishment of council blocks and worked with individual tenants to get Pinnacle and the Council to fulfil their responsibilities. The **Hackney Independent** is one way in which we try to put across a working class perspective. Do you like what you read in the Hackney Independent? We are the only paper that goes out in Hackney that is on the side of the working class. But we are not strong enough yet, and you can do something about that.

Can you deliver the next edition of the paper to your block or street?

Better still could you be a local contact for the IWCA? This would mean phoning in any information about what is happening on your estate so that we can either cover it in the paper or campaign for things to be done about it. As a contact you might also get our posters put up on local noticeboards or ask shops to put them up.

If you can attend occasional meetings to help plan campaigns and agree what should go in the paper then you would be very welcome.

If you want to help, but are not sure what you can do then you can give us a ring. If you are not sure what the IWCA is about you can also give us a call. If you want we can send someone around to have a chat, or we can meet in your local cafe or pub. Get in touch and we can begin to change things around here.

Send this form to New Contacts, Hackney IWCA, Box 48, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS. If you want to talk to someone first, leave a message on 07000 752752 and we will get back to you. Please repeat your phone number.

I can deliver the Hackney Independent in my block or street	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can be a local contact for the IWCA	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can come to IWCA meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Diary

with "The Green Man"



You Heard It Here First!
Front covers of Spring edition of Hackney Independent & Hackney Gazette June 14th



The last edition of the Hackney Independent told you all about the sell-offs of council facilities caused by the council's massive debts three months before the local Hackney Gazette ran the same story.

A blue car and a red car were abandoned next to each other by the canal in Haggerston, both vandalised. A local tenant activist spray painted "Tories" on one and "New Labour" on the other, which is useful as you normally can't tell them apart. The Green Man's only comment was to ask why the pile of sand and builders rubbish piled next to them wasn't sprayed with "Lib Dems."

We know that it's already impossible to find your councillor apart from at election time, but two Hackney councillors have taken things a step further. Labour's Jessica Webb and Lib Dem Adrian Gee-Turner stood for Parliament in the June elections for constituencies outside Hackney. All their fine words about standing up for local people and at the first chance they are off, pledging to stand up for people in Woodford and Dagenham respectively. Lib Dem Councillor Gee-Turner also made a fool of himself in the Gazette recently, supporting plans to make hard core porn films in his ward.

We hear that £1000 a week New Deal Director Michael Pyner has been keeping himself busy in his weekend home in Brighton. He's has joined a far Left group and spent the election campaign helping them to get a few hundred votes for "saving the planet." If he wants to bring their "tax the rich" slogan closer to home he could put his hand in his pocket and fund the next issue of the Hackney Independent. All donations welcome.

Thanks to Paul from De Beauvoir estate for sending us an advert from – of all places - the Tatler. This is not the usual reading material for most of us, which is exactly why the new flats opposite the college on Kingsland Road are being advertised there. With the cheapest flat going for £400,000 there's no chance of the average Hackney Independent reader moving in. And that's exactly the point – they are not for us.

(congestion charges from page 2) IWCA spokesman Peter Sutton told the Hackney Independent "It seems to me that the Labour Party is trying to make it easier to drive in Central London for those who can afford it. City workers, lawyers and dot.com millionaires will be happy to pay £25 a week to keep the rest of us off their streets. When you look at it that way it is a class issue." One group has managed to get themselves exempted from charges, though. *MP's will not have to pay.*