The ‘Decent Homes’ Con

Labour’s ‘Choice’ of Privatisation or No Repairs

For fifty years Labour was the party that built council housing as homes for the working class. Now Labour wants rid of council housing in the next seven years so that it can build more private housing for the middle class.

If you look around you from Wenlock Basin, Gainsborough Studios, along Kingsland Road, at Cremer Street and at Goldsmith’s Row you see big smart blocks of flats going up. Never council housing for our overcrowded families or our sons and daughters – always private housing for the middle class.

Now the Government has said all council housing must reach the “decent homes standard” in the next 7 years. They have put forward three “options” to bring in the money needed - with the enthusiastic backing of our Labour council. But as usual the only choice is “what kind of privatisation do you want?”:

- STOCK TRANSFER – your estate sold off to a housing association
- PRIVATE FINANCE (PFI) – control of your estate handed over to a private company for thirty years
- ARMS LENGTH MANAGEMENT (ALMO) – a private company takes over the running of all Hackney estates for 10 years.

Yet again Labour are pushing their privatisation agenda on us and denying us the choice of staying with the council. This decent homes standard is a con. They think that by saying they will finally do the repairs to our estates we will accept their privatisation plans. We say spend the millions of pounds of rent and service charges we pay on improving the cleaning and state of repairs on our estates.

One proposal which has been put forward for discussion involves building private flats on the open spaces on our estates to raise money for repairs. While this is better than any of the three privatisation options, there are two points that need to be made:

- Aren’t we over-crowded enough already and don’t we need our green space?
- Why not also build new council homes in between the private flats as well? If it is good enough for us to take private neighbours, why should private owners not have council tenants as their immediate neighbours?

Hackney Council’s Lies about Housing

The Council sent out a DVD giving their side of the story on privatising our estates, starring Radio 1 DJ Trevor Nelson. It was a deliberate attempt to mislead Hackney’s tenants and leaseholders into thinking that there were three good options and our views would be taken into account before a decision was made. The truth is that the Council will sell off any estate where it thinks it can con the tenants into voting for it and that Hackney councillors and top officers are pushing for the creation of an ALMO here – their third so-called option.

Among all the misleading information and part-truths Hackney Independent can identify four outright LIES on the DVD:

- Trev on Nelson says “over the last 10 years the Council has been transforming estates like Kingsmead.” The TRUTH is that the Council sold off Kingsmead to Sanctuary Housing Association. When a young boy was killed during the building work the Council made clear they had no responsibility.
- Trev on Nelson says housing associations are “not for profit organisations” and that any money they make is invested back into your home. The TRUTH is that the big housing associations pay their top officers over £100,000 a year and many pay out bonuses to top staff. Money they make is normally invested in buying more land to expand their empires.
- Trev on Nelson says that “housing association rents would be broadly in line with council rents.” The TRUTH is that nationally their rents are 13% higher than council rents – if you pay £60 a week they pay £68.
- Trev on Nelson says an Arms Length Management Organisation would be run by an elected management board. The TRUTH is that we would not be able to vote the majority of the Board in or out. In Islington the new ALMO there has only 7 out of 17 elected Board members. The rest are appointed through the Council.

We expect this sort of thing from Hackney Council – but our advice to Trevor Nelson is to stick to spinning records and leave the political spinning to Hackney Council’s privatisation PR machine.
An Interview with Yejide Adeoye

Haggerston resident Yejide Adeoye has just finished a university degree during which she made a study of recent changes in Broadway Market.

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE TO STUDY BROADWAY MARKET?

It seemed to be really changing. There were a lot of people moving into the area - middle class professionals, not families, but young single people. On Broadway Market lots of the old shops have closed down like the florist, TV repairs, and second hand furniture shop. There were lots of new shops arriving but they didn’t seem representative of the local area. They were selling things like handmade shoes and pottery. I wanted to understand why these shops had located themselves here.

HOW DO YOU CONDUCT YOUR STUDY?

I interviewed 10 businesses that had been here for over 5 years and 10 that had just moved here. I also spoke to local people. One shopkeeper told me about plans for a Broadway Market Farmers Market. It was weird because he’d only been there for 2 months and he knew more about it than I did! So I also spoke to the Markets Manager from Hackney council.

WHAT DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE NEW FARMERS MARKET?

Hackney council’s Markets Manager told me they wanted to make Broadway Market into a brand and give it an identity. They wanted it to be seen as ‘the’ market in the area. He felt that somewhere like Dalston Market was too cheap and the area needed an up market destination. He saw Broadway Market as a blueprint for markets for the future in Hackney.

WHAT DID LOCAL PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE FARMERS MARKET?

Locals on the estates aren’t really bothered about the Farmers Market. They know it’s not really for them. They are more interested in real facilities. Also, look at the prices there. I wanted to go and get an apple pie. Then I saw it was £6.50! The prices are not affordable for most people.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN BROADWAY MARKET?

I wanted to set up a community centre here - a place with resources for local people and for the youth to go. Things like that might start to give young people some hope. But to do that you really need your own money. You can’t rely on the council!

Bread on Broadway... £2.50 loaves are aimed at wealthy outsiders not locals

We are told that things are getting better by papers like ‘Hackney Today’ and ‘In Shoreditch’.

THEY SAY the council is now improving. THEY SAY millions of pounds are being spent on this area. THEY SAY the Council empowering the community and you should get involved.

WE SAY nothing has changed for the better. The council is as badly run as ever. They do what they want and never improve our lives. Any new money is just for the short term to replace what the Council used to pay for directly. They only look out for the interests of middle class settlers - getting private flats built and supporting their new bars and restaurants.

The IWCA wants to drive the Labour Party out of Haggerston and Hoxton - they don’t represent working class interests. We want to block the development of private flats. We want to defend what we have got from being cut back or sold off. We are trying to build an organisation that can take on and defeat Labour in elections, play a part in community campaigns and try to do practical things like advice sessions and run kids’ films shows. You can help.

To get in touch phone Carl Taylor on 020 7684 1743, write to us at Hackney IWCA, PO Box 47000, London E8 4WW, or email us at info@hackneyiwca.org.

Banking on a Good Education

Although Craven Park Primary School in Stamford Hill, was recently saved from closure by a strong local campaign it’s worth remembering what has become Laburnum Primary School in Haggerston. The ‘Bridge Academy’ is soon to be built on the site with a £2 million contribution from Swiss banking firm UBS. This is Hackney’s second academy, and is part of the government’s strategy of encouraging greater private sector involvement in education. Do you think it’s right for a bank to be involved in educating our kids?

Laburnum Street Party Success

The Laburnum Street Party on 26 June, organised by the Haggerston Pool Campaign and supported by local tenant associations, was a great success. The party combined stalls run by residents as well as a sound stage exhibiting local talent and lots of activities for kids. The Laburnum Boat Club was also open for those who wanted to mess about on the water with stewarding. The aim of the day was to raise the profile of the Pool Campaign and a few quid towards future campaigning. For the latest on the Pool Campaign check out www.haggerstonpool.com.

Olympics 2012: Empty Promises?

Ex-Tory MP and athlete Sebastian Coe has been appointed as front-man for London’s Olympic bid. He has recently claimed that the most important aspect of a successful bid is the legacy it leaves for local people: sports facilities, transport links and affordable housing. Many locals are far from convinced by this promise. Users of Hackney Marshes face the loss of existing sports facilities to make way for a giant car-park. Ironically community-based sports facilities face further cut-backs in anticipation of a ‘possible’ Olympic windfall. We also have to be sceptical of the promise of affordable housing for locals - at the Sydney Olympics the Village was given over to a development of luxury flats. Londoners face a 10% Council Tax surcharge for the next eight years if the bid is successful. Will Mr Coe guarantee that property developers are not the only winners at the next Olympics?

IWCA Takes Three Seats on Oxford Council

On the 10th of June, the IWCA in Oxford shocked the local Labour party to the core when it took three council seats in working class wards. It was a particular humiliation for cabinet minister Andrew Smith who had personally spearheaded the attempt to unseat the IWCA’s existing councillor, Stuart Craft. The turnout in Northfield Brook and Blackbird Leys was three times as high as a result of the IWCA work on the ground. Clearly ordinary people do see us as a genuine alternative. As reported in the Oxford Mail, ‘Lord Mayor Patrick Stannard, a Labour stalwart and a supporter of the established party, said: ‘The party can appeal to the core when it takes three council seats in working class wards. It was a particular humiliation for cabinet minister Andrew Smith who had personally spearheaded the attempt to unseat the IWCA’s existing councillor, Stuart Craft. The turnout in Northfield Brook and Blackbird Leys was three times as high as a result of the IWCA work on the ground. Clearly ordinary people do see us as a genuine alternative. As reported in the Oxford Mail, ‘Lord Mayor Patrick Stannard, a Labour stalwart and a supporter of the established party, said: ‘The party can appeal to the Labour Party out of Haggerston and Hoxton - they don’t represent working class interests. We want to block the development of private flats. We want to defend what we have got from being cut back or sold off. We are trying to build an organisation that can take on and beat Labour in elections, play a part in community campaigns and try to do practical things like advice sessions and run kids’ films shows. You can help.

To get in touch phone Carl Taylor on 020 7684 1743, write to us at Hackney IWCA, PO Box 47000, London E8 4WW, or email us at info@hackneyiwca.org.

We believe that this success vindicates our approach in Hackney - a place with resources for local people and for the youth to go. Things like that might start to give young people some hope. But to do that you really need your own money. You can’t pursue their interests.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN BROADWAY MARKET?

I wanted to set up a community centre here - a place with resources for local people and for the youth to go. Things like that might start to give young people some hope. But to do that you really need your own money. You can’t pursue their interests.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN BROADWAY MARKET?

I wanted to set up a community centre here - a place with resources for local people and for the youth to go. Things like that might start to give young people some hope. But to do that you really need your own money. You can’t pursue their interests.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN BROADWAY MARKET?

I wanted to set up a community centre here - a place with resources for local people and for the youth to go. Things like that might start to give young people some hope. But to do that you really need your own money. You can’t pursue their interests.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN BROADWAY MARKET?

I wanted to set up a community centre here - a place with resources for local people and for the youth to go. Things like that might start to give young people some hope. But to do that you really need your own money. You can’t pursue their interests.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN BROADWAY MARKET?

I wanted to set up a community centre here - a place with resources for local people and for the youth to go. Things like that might start to give young people some hope. But to do that you really need your own money. You can’t pursue their interests.