

UK: Pro-Corbyn councillors sabotage fight against Labour's social cleansing

By Robert Stevens and Margot Miller
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Supporters of Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn on Haringey Council, London have paved the way for a massive housing privatisation programme.

The Labour council in north London is led by Claire Kober, a Blairite. But the Labour right were able to push their plans for the destruction of working class housing through at a meeting because 22 Corbyn-supporting Labour councillors—out of 49—failed to show for the crucial vote on what is known as the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV). Absent the 22 councillors, who are backed by the pro-Corbyn Momentum campaign group, a Liberal Democrat motion to oppose the plan failed at the crucial December 4 meeting. The Labour council duly backed the HDV and approved the demolition of the working-class Love Lane council estate by 27 votes to 8.

Momentum emerged after Corbyn won the 2015 Labour leadership on a “left” platform of opposition to austerity and war. Set up to oppose the subsequent efforts of the Blairite right to remove Corbyn as leader, Momentum won the support of tens of thousands of mainly young Labour members and supporters and succeeded in securing Corbyn's victory in a leadership contest triggered by the Blairites in September 2016.

The Corbynite councillors in Haringey had the numbers to defeat the Blairites and their social-cleansing policies. But they chose to avoid delivering what would have been a significant defeat for the right wing, not just in Haringey but throughout London and nationally.

The vote was critical to carrying through the biggest privatisation in UK council history—involving a handover of £2 billion of public assets. Everything from libraries, school buildings, council homes, care homes, the civic centre—are to be run on a 50-50 basis

by the council and Australian-based conglomerate Lendlease.

Britain's pseudo-left groups, led by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Party (SP), have played the role of apologist for the Corbynites' betrayal.

The SWP and SP insisted that the way to defeat the plans of the right was to win the support of “rebel” councillors in Haringey. This was the central axis of the StopHDV campaign, which advocated deselecting pro-HDV councillors in favour of those who opposed the privatisation.

An article was published December 5 in *Socialist Worker* following the vote—but clearly prepared beforehand—under the optimistic headline, “Estates campaign caused the Labour right's woe in Haringey council.”

The SWP is enthused. The article begins, “The battle between left and right in the Labour Party has come starkly into the open in Haringey, north London. Selection contests for the candidates for local elections next May have seen the right wing routed.”

And so things proceed, until, midpoint, the SWP has to deal with the events of the previous evening. “Socialist Worker welcomes the shift left in Labour. But this week came a warning about the limits of elections and working inside Labour,” it writes.

“The vote could have gone against the demolition, or at least been much closer, if they had attended. But this would have meant voting against the whip. Disgustingly the right could have seized the chance to push through suspensions. Regrettably the left stayed away.”

The SWP makes clear that, while it regrets the actions of the nominal “lefts”, it quite understands their plight given the possibility of suspensions by the right.

The behaviour of the Blairites it states was “disgusting”. Not so the “lefts” who allowed the Blairites to get their way.

The SWP prepared the way for this betrayal by its depiction of these political careerists and cowards as the frontline of a Corbyn-led resistance movement. As the *Socialist Worker* wrote on October 3, “The Labour council in Haringey, north London, has defied the plans for social housing laid out in Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn’s conference speech. Corbyn called for estate residents to have votes on proposed regeneration projects. ‘After Grenfell we must think again about what are called regeneration schemes,’ he said. The move brings the Labour leadership into almost direct opposition to Labour councils pushing through such projects.”

Rather than an arena for direct opposition between left and right, Haringey became an occasion for immediate capitulation and yet another exposure of the hollow character of Corbyn’s “anti-austerity” rhetoric.

The Socialist Party played an equally rotten role. In its last article prior to the December 4 vote, published November 15, the SP wrote that “the majority of Labour councillors in Haringey are determined to ignore local and Labour Party opposition and to push ahead with the HDV.”

The truth is, as the subsequent voting numbers proved, had the 22 Momentum-backed councillors showed up and opposed the right, the privatisation plans would have been defeated.

The Socialist Party called on Corbyn to “personally intervene to prevent HDV proponents Claire Kober and Alan Strickland from standing as Labour Party candidates in these [May 2018] elections.” Yet even as the SP was busy sowing illusions in Corbyn fighting the HDV, his supporters were preparing a stay-away designed to allow HDV to proceed without a shot being fired.

The SP is now more shamefaced than even the SWP in dealing with the left councillors’ betrayal. In its December 5 article on Haringey, and in subsequent articles, the SP has not even reported on Momentum’s role in the vote to push through HDV.

Haringey is a microcosm of the role played by Momentum and the pseudo-left in disarming working class resistance with their claims that Corbyn’s leadership has transformed the Labour Party.

The HDV is part of this social cleansing of the working class from London, to release land in what is a prime location for property developers. With the land Haringey is handing over, Lendlease expects to make a killing.

Haringey already has a waiting list of 9,000 for council flats, while 3,000 tenants languish in temporary accommodation. In the poorest areas of Haringey, two-bed flats go on the market for £500,000. The HDV will begin with the demolition of 1,000 council homes and the building of luxury accommodations that only the wealthiest can afford, greatly exacerbating the housing crisis and driving out working class residents from seven well-established council estates. While 6,400 private homes are expected to be built under the deal, the very few supposedly “affordable” properties will have to be accessed through separate entrances widely known as “poor doors.”

Last week, Haringey Council also gave the green light to international property developer Far East Consortium to redevelop the historic Grade II Listed Hornsey Town Hall. This will see the Modernist-style Town Hall, which dates back to 1935, turned into 146 luxury flats, with just 11 designated as “affordable”. The council is carrying this out in the face of local opposition, with 7,000 signing a petition to oppose it.

In excusing the treachery of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, the SWP and SP often resort to describing their sell-outs as “regrettable” or “unfortunate”. However, Haringey is the most open attack by the Corbynites on the working class so far to be sanctioned by the pseudo-left. What it demonstrates is the extent to which the pseudo-left will go to back and legitimise every attack on the working class carried out, not just by Labour councils, but by a Corbyn-led Labour government.

To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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