

# Green Left News

Spring 2010

<http://greenleftblog.blogspot.com/>

<http://gplu.net/gleft/greenleft.shtml>

## Joseph Healy Co-Convenor of Green Left poses thoughts on the General Election 2010

As we approach the general election, an election which will lead to whichever of the neo-liberal parties is elected introducing swingeing cuts which will make the Thatcher period seem benign in comparison. We have already seen indications of this in Mandelson's speech announcing the cuts to universities – he was quoted as saying "much of the rest of the public sector will face similar constraints this year or soon after." The Tories, for their part, have been clear that an emergency budget will be introduced within weeks of the general election and savage cuts in the public sector introduced. The Lib Dems are trotting along behind with their own plans for cuts. Indeed it is reminiscent of the old joke where the executioner asks the prisoner how he would like to be executed. We can already see the effects of such a regime in the Irish Republic where benefits have been severely cut and unemployment benefit for those under 25 cut by 50% - the Tories have openly lauded the Irish measures. Birmingham City Council has just announced job cuts of 2,000 staff and this is just the beginning. With youth unemployment soaring, another generation is going to be put on the scrap heap as many communities were in the 80s by Thatcher, many of whom have never recovered.

Meanwhile the gap between rich and poor grows ever wider and has continued to grow under the Labour government – latest stats show that the richest 10% in the UK are 100 times richer than the poorest 10%. This gross inequality is leading to social breakdown, huge health problems in the poorest communities and a spiral of despair leading to crime, drug addiction and alienation. An incoming government with a programme of cuts and without any plans for radical redistribution of wealth will lead to a continuation of the 'broken Britain' which we all know so well.

The dispossessed and many of those alienated from politics by corruption scandals etc, are turning towards the extreme Right. There is a real danger of a BNP breakthrough in Barking and gains in several council elections. A win for Nick Griffin in Barking would be a disaster for race relations and social cohesion in Britain and would inevitably lead to a massive increase in hate crime, as is already evident in areas where the BNP are strong, and those forces allied to the BNP (the English Defence League) would also be strengthened. This is why Green Left is calling for a united campaign against Fascism in Barking and for the Greens to stand down in order to maximise the anti-Fascist vote. A BNP MP would be a disaster for British politics.

After the failure of Copenhagen we can see that for big business and its allies in the world's governments it is going to be business as usual. The struggle against climate change must continue. The one bright spot on the horizon is the

possibility of a Green breakthrough in this general election with Caroline Lucas in Brighton. The election of Caroline and the possibility of her working with a progressive block in Westminster would transform UK politics and offer hope for the future. With the economic and political storm clouds gathering a Green victory would really provide inspiration for many disillusioned by the current tired and discredited model of politics in Britain. Green Left, with those on the Left committed to a non-sectarian and genuinely progressive politics, will play its part in trying to secure that breakthrough. **There is everything to play for in the next few weeks.**

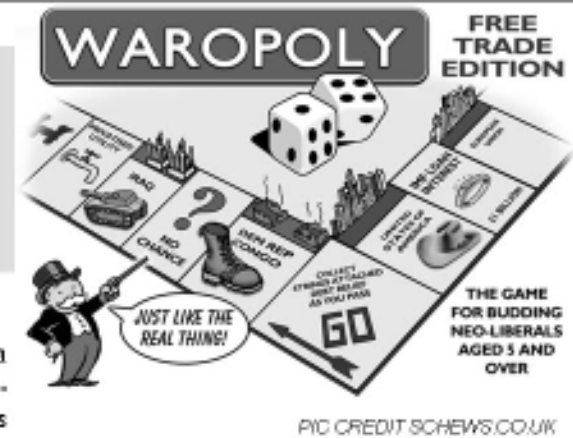
## We still need to agitate for LGBT rights, argues Phelim Mac Cafferty, National Chair LGBTGreens

So the German Shepherd of the Catholic Church is coming to visit Britain in the autumn and it will leave a legacy which is about pushing back the equalities agenda in this country. Pope Benedict stated the use of condoms 'aggravates' the spread of AIDS, a move the respected medical journal *The Lancet* stated "distorted scientific evidence to promote Catholic doctrine on this issue." He upholds the long-term position of inequality between men and women, expressed in part by the grip of the Catholic Church in places like Poland and Ireland over a woman's right to choose. Attacking the Equalities Bill because it violated 'natural law', as it argued for the employment rights of LGBT employees, it's hard not to connect hatred from the pulpit and the increased militancy of bigots expressed so tragically in the murder of Londoner Ian Baynham and Brightonian Andrea Waddell in October last year. And while Police sources talk of an increase in reporting as an indication of engagement with the LGBT community, the latest violent hate crimes speak of a renewed hatred, which has been sparked in part by the prominence of the violent, fascist BNP.

While it's easy to argue against a former Hitler Youth, there are larger concerns over the role of religion throughout society like the fact that the UK is the only nation bar Iran to have official ecclesiastical representation in a national parliament. In the recent debates over the Equalities Bill, Christian Concern for our Nation among others lobbied successfully to remove amendments relating to the employment of LGBT people.

*LGBTGreens have argued in a complimentary way to other parts of the party for a secular approach to politics and at this conference, delegates have an opportunity to help the Green Party lead the way on LGBT politics by voting for marriage rights for LGBT people and for civil partnership rights for straight people.*

**Green Left News edited by Phelim Mac Cafferty on behalf of Green Left**



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## A Grass-roots movement is needed to fight inequality; we need an alternative economic strategy writes Sean Thompson

*The Spirit Level*, which has caused such a stir since its publication a year ago, demonstrates conclusively that income inequality is bad for society in a multitude of measurable ways, and that more equal societies are more healthy and happy. This was reinforced last month by the publication of the government commissioned *Anatomy of Economic Inequality* in the UK, which highlights the fact that inequality in Britain is, today, greater than at any time since World War 2.

Its findings show that the household wealth of the top 10% of the population stands at £853,000, which is over 100 times higher than that of the bottom 10% £8,800 or below; while those in the top 1% each possess total household wealth of £2.6m or more.

### Poorest incomes fall £9 a week

Since 2007, the poorest 10% of households have seen weekly incomes fall by £9 a week, while those in the richest 10% of homes have enjoyed a £45 a week increase. Overall, the poorest 20% saw real income fall by 2.6% in the three years to 2007-08, while those in the top fifth of the income distribution enjoyed a rise of 3.3%. Our tax regime is also deeply unfair. At the moment, the poorest 10% of the population pay 36.5% of their income in tax, while the richest 10% of the population pay only 35.6%.

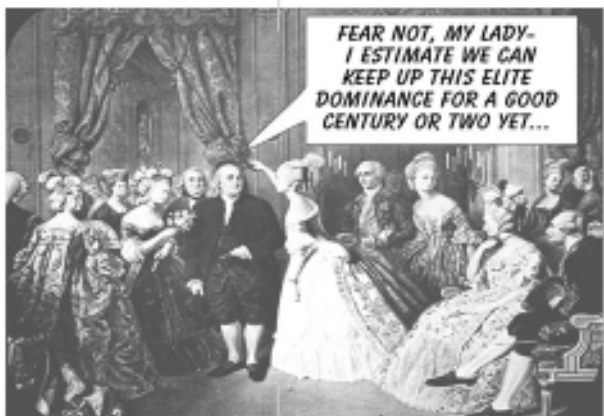
We all know that whatever combination of Tories, New Labour or Lib Dems forms the next government, it will institute the most savage cuts in social spending since the 1920s. Anne Pettifor and the others have pointed out both the injustice of such cuts, which mean that ordinary people will have to bear the burden of the vast debts incurred by the Government in propping up a banking system bankrupted by its own greed; and the madness of such a strategy, which is likely to lead to a prolonged period of semi slump and quite possibly a 'double-dip' recession.

### GREEN NEW DEAL

We should make the case again and again that the way forward is not to try to return to business as usual or to the dark days of Thatcher, but through the development of a Green New Deal which would create at least a million jobs through the radical rebuilding of our social and industrial infrastructure. Such a programme could and should be funded by a fairer and more efficient tax system which is determinedly redistributionist, providing not only the resources we need to fund our Green New Deal programme but also reducing income inequality and the social ills that flow from it. Stabilising current account spending and an extended Green New Deal

can both be paid for by cutting harmful spending, such as defence and environmentally damaging road programmes and subsidies to the Aircraft lobby, along with harmful social policies like the ID National Database; and by increasing income through fairer direct taxation, by plugging tax loopholes and by introducing a tax on Sterling transactions.

Rebalancing the tax system means raising the tax threshold, so that the lowest paid workers pay nothing, while greatly increasing tax levels and removing the National Insurance cap for the tiny minority who currently benefit from low tax rates, generous tax breaks and gaping tax loopholes. Such a rebalancing would mean that those working full time on the minimum wage would gain over £1100 a year and wage earners on the median income would gain almost £900, while those with incomes of £200,000 would pay at least an additional £77,000.



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At the moment, the very wealthy can avoid huge amounts of tax through generous tax relief on pension contributions, while company profits benefit through very low levels of corporation tax. Ending the tax relief on pension contributions from incomes over £100,000 a year, introducing a 15% surcharge on investment income for all higher rate tax payers and increasing corporation tax to 40%, would easily make up for reductions in tax on lower paid workers. Plugging current tax loopholes and ending tax avoidance schemes would take some time to achieve, but could bring in £25bn a year if fully effective, and a Sterling Stamp Duty of 0.1% on all sterling foreign exchange transactions could raise more than £30bn year – between them, these two measures could fund the bulk of our reconstruction programme.

However, the growth in inequality over recent decades has been made possible only by the determined use of the machinery of the state to suppress any serious organised popular opposition, particularly through the implementation of a complex raft of anti trade union legislation and more recently the creation of a similar web of so-called anti-terror laws and the development of the 'surveillance state'.

The only way that the coming wave of attacks on living standards and jobs can be fought against and an alternative economic and social strategy fought for is by playing a part in organising a grass roots movement in opposition to increasing inequality and decreasing civil rights, capable of mobilising ordinary people in every neighbourhood in the country. We should take as our model the anti Poll Tax movement, which, in the early nineties involved over 17 million people, defeated the Tory Government and put the first nail in Thatcher's coffin.

**"A world must be overturned, but every tear that has flowed and might have been wiped away is an indictment; and a man hurrying to perform a great deed who steps on even a worm out of unfeeling carelessness commits a crime." Rosa Luxemburg**

**"Those who do not move, do not notice their chains." Rosa Luxemburg**

## As continuous attacks occur on the welfare benefits of workers New Labour is for Spinning, not Turning argues Alan Wheatley, Green Party Spokesperson on Disability and Social Care

**New Labour** has to go to the polls by June of this year. One of the major issues that I intend to publicise for the sake of informed voter choice is Green Party opposition to the Welfare Reform Act 2009 that became law on 12 November. This Act strips disabled people of 'lifelong development' freedoms that the UK Government signed up to in the UN Convention on Rights of Person with Disabilities. I would encourage readers to find out as much about the Welfare Reform Act and the Convention as they can. I list some online resources at the end of this piece. Here my focus is the misleading nature of much government propaganda about the welfare reforms dedicated to stripping claimants of their rights.

The disinformation nature of a 19 January 2010 online news release from the Department for Work & Pensions reminds me of a 1980 Conservative government publication 'Protect & Survive' about how to survive the aftermath of a nuclear attack.

'Welfare Reform — Fewer people left behind in this recession' boldly states: "A new test which focuses on what people can do rather than what they can't is keeping more people seeking work, new figures show today. Thousands of people are now moving towards work rather than being left to claim sickness benefit." [1]

In fact the Work Capability Assessment test performed by Atos Medical Services on behalf of the DWP is based on the principles and practices of the American health insurance industry that President Obama has sought to overturn. The WCA is used on claimants of the Employment and Support Allowance that came into being on 27 October 2007 and has given rise to great concern among groups of disabled people and carers. 'Examining Medical Practitioners' employed by Atos have clearly been driven more by government targets than by claimant condition. Employment and Support Allowance level for a single person is £89.30 for those in the 'working to-

wards work' group. Those placed in 'the support group' face far less bullying and a further £5 per week. (The government calls the legalised bullying 'conditionality'.)

Claimants told that they are 'not disabled enough' to be eligible for ESA Jobseekers Allowance are directed toward Jobseekers Allowance (£64.30 per

**Our focus must be the misleading nature of much government propaganda about the welfare reforms dedicated to stripping claimants of their rights.**

week for single over-25s; much lower for school leavers).

The numbers of seriously ill ESA claimants placed in the 'work related activity group' has been a huge concern for groups such as CarerWatch and veteran disability rights campaigner Joseph Healy, as well as Citizens Advice Scotland. [2] [3] In LB Camden, the disabled people's organisation Disability in Camden is the only source of advocacy support for ESA claimants through tribunals. One tribunals expert covered 15 appeals in December 2009, including three hearing attendances in one day. Camden CAB have pulled out of such support because of the immense amount of work and stress involved. None the less, figures given out by the DWP conveniently fail to acknowledge that any ESA appeal tribunals find in the claimant's favour. [4]

The Minister for Disabled People, Jonathan Shaw, responded in October 2009 to criticisms about the misery imposed by the Work Capability Assessment by saying that ESA and the WCA had created "a more proactive system." Shaw's 19 January claim that ESA was created in collaboration with the major disability charities is nothing new. He now fails to

acknowledge the misery that "improvements and changes" would supposedly avert. [5]

Contrast Shaw's talk of "a more proactive system" with Joseph Healy's report that people with only months left to live are obliged to attend their local jobcentre. Jobcentres "are clogged up with people unable to work and desperately ill because of government red tape," reports a jobcentre worker. [6]

I am reminded of a Home Office reply in September 1980 to my preference for voluntary euthanasia over drinking from a toilet bowl in the aftermath of a nuclear attack. Nicola Wearden of the Home Office reported that "it would take several thousand nuclear bombs, systematically placed country, to devastate the whole of the UK." (That was under a Conservative government.)

### Notes

[1] <http://www.wired-gov.net/wg/wg-news-1.nsf/ifi/410417>

[2] <http://carerwatch.com/mhealth>

[3] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/8326929.stm>

[4] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/8326929.stm>

[5] <http://www.wired-gov.net/wg/wg-news-1.nsf/ifi/410417>

[6] <http://carerwatch.com/mhealth>

See also

<http://www.cpag.org.uk>

<http://www.nas.org.uk>

<http://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk>

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>



## Migrant workers continue to be scapegoated for the economic crisis yet their rights are continuously forgotten, argues Joint International Coordinator, Farid Bakht

**Migrants** are invisible in the world of the environment, economics and politics. They are definitely in the sights of the media if they fit a particular frame. The Muslim. The Asylum Seeker. The one 'jumping the queue for housing'.

Yet, when it comes to climate change, whose voices did we hear? Wasn't Bangladesh one of the most mentioned countries in the run up to Copenhagen? Yet, in the cacophony of NGOs, experts and concerned politicians, who heard the voices of the Bangladeshi diaspora living in London, Europe or North America? It seemed everyone wanted to talk about Bangladesh. Very few wanted to talk to Bangladeshis or hear what they thought.

### Brick Lane

I went to an exhibition of art in Brick Lane in November. A well-known NGO was staging a collection of paintings by an artist who had gone to Bangladesh, visited villages vulnerable to rising waters and commissioned to put brush to paper.

At the function, there was a smattering of concerned progressive individuals, chattering earnestly about what they were doing, networking, and admiring the work. It was all smiles and positive thinking.

I innocently asked one of the organisers: "where are the Bangladeshis?" What a silly question. After all, we were in the heart of Banglatown talking about their country of origin and the bleak future ahead of them, surrounded by 50,000 of their countrymen.

The question was apparently puzzling, and elicited a response: we don't usually invite them to these kinds of 'dos'..... who do you think we should have invited?... Councillors...?

To which, I replied very politely (as I was representing the Green Party, and we are supposed to be cuddly and nice) "Er, yes and other opinion formers, leaders of the community and experts too. Even a couple of 'ordinary people' perhaps."

I thought the latter could explain why

they are still sending money back to a country which climate experts say will become a disaster zone because of worse floods, drought, rising sea water, and be economically ruinous. I am not expecting future invitations.

### The World Bank v the migrant

When it comes to economic development, progressive voices say we need to raise foreign aid to 0.7% of GDP. Or more. Despite being advocates of 'savage cuts', the political consensus of the major parties is that 'foreign aid' should be protected, ring-fenced or even enhanced.

Yet, who mentions remittances? The fact that at least £200 billion goes through official channels every year. This is equivalent to foreign aid and investment

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by multinationals put together.

More over, the money sent by waiters, cleaners and shopkeepers comes without strings. No advice about privatisation, liberalisation or de-regulation. No advice about how to run the country. No advice about shutting down factories, throwing people out of jobs and effectively de-industrialising entire sectors of the economy.

We are all aware of the World Bank, DFID and IMF.

We lump good aid and bad aid together, agreeing more must be sent. Yet, we ignore the migrants who send so much more, effectively 'free money'. Politicians in most countries do the same. They allow themselves to be manipulated by the 'Aid Consortium' or as they call them 'donors'.

And most do very little for the migrant. Exceptions are some Latin American countries and I am sure you can guess which ones treat migrants fairly.

I mentioned Bangladesh earlier. Foreign Aid is £1.2 billion. Take away £0.7 billion which they must pay every year in debt repayment. Then take away the

rest which goes in paying for consultants and imported goods and services.

The Bangladeshi diaspora sent £7 billion last year. Promised the right the vote, they still cannot. They are harassed at airports when they return. When any of them get into trouble abroad, they are left to fend for themselves. The government turns a blind eye to mal-treatment especially in the oil-rich kingdoms of the Middle East. Or students in distress in East London.

The policy is simple: they call people going abroad 'manpower export'. Like any car, or shirt that is sold abroad, the government is interested in the foreign exchange which keeps their economy afloat. The people are secondary.

### Elections & Votes

What about politicians here?

In London, you would have thought everyone would be jumping up and down trying to secure their vote.

Why? Because one in four of Londoners is of foreign origin perhaps.

Well, that's not how it works.

Roughly half a million cannot vote as they are illegal, for various reasons.

The others can be seen as useful in the European elections or GLA ones — but they are not cast in the starring role in case in alienates the 'mainstream voter'. Let's not go there for now. But, with immigration being a political football with political consequences throughout this island, the migrant is framed in some of the categories mentioned at the start of this article.

As possibly the most internationalist Party, Left of Centre, in the true sense, we should be taking this issue seriously and ensuring we monitor whether our candidates or membership reflect the communities and constituencies and whether we have engaged with them sufficiently.

The migrant is unfairly dumped at the bottom of the pile.

Filipino regimes are not well known for being progressive. In one aspect, they excel themselves. They officially call their diaspora: heroes.

**"Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue.**

**It is through disobedience and rebellion that progress has been made." Oscar Wilde**