

Brighton Benefits Campaign

The *Other* BBC News

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BENEFITS ARE UNDER ATTACK!

FIGHT BACK!



Squeezing us until we squeak

As the economic crisis deepens, we are being constantly bombarded by a message from almost everyone with power - that we've been 'living beyond our means' and therefore must face massive cuts. The question is usually framed simply as what should be cut, rather than if there should be cuts.

Assault on the public sector

The government has immediately trained its sights on two groups of people - public sector workers, who provide supposedly wasteful services such as education and health, and anyone on benefits. The government have unleashed £11bn in benefit cuts, slashing tax credits and housing benefits while freezing child benefit. Meanwhile they will continue the previous government's punitive workfare schemes, aimed at forcing the unemployed to work for benefit levels. In this assault they evoke wild tabloid tales of 'benefit scroungers' supposedly bleeding us dry - though recent figures show that only 1% of all benefit payments are fraudulent.

The real scroungers

The reality is that there is a group of useless scroungers to whom we've been far too generous. In 2009 the 1000 richest people in Britain saw their wealth soar by £77bn, a huge increase in the middle of recession. These people are bankers, speculators in currency and property, the owners of huge businesses - in short, the very people responsible for the crisis. Yet while we face wage cuts, job losses, benefit cuts, and the destruction of our public services, the only cut they're made to bear is to the rate of corporation tax. Corporations and their leaders dodge £100-£130bn in tax a year - but rather than stop this enormous theft by the rich, the government will make it worse with huge cuts in the civil service.

Not a cure for the crisis

The cuts don't even make economic sense. The cuts will throw around 700,000 public sector workers onto the dole, to be joined by another 600,000 private sector workers who sell products and services to

the public sector. As these workers are laid off, their spending power will fall, driving down demand and causing more job losses. Ironically, spending on benefits will rise as more people become unemployed, and the fall in workers' wages will lead to lower tax revenues, causing the deficit to rise and the economy to spiral down into deeper recession.



Resist every cut

While the cuts will batter ordinary people and do nothing to revive the economy, big business will run laughing to the bank. Bosses know that, as more and more people compete for fewer jobs, they will be free to tighten the screws on their workers, reducing wages, increasing hours, and creaming off the profit for themselves. As public spending is cut, speculators will swoop in to demand privatisation, turning formerly public services into money-making schemes. The cuts will serve no purpose at all except to drive everything in society to conform to the brutal rules of capitalism - that nothing can be allowed to exist unless it makes a profit for bankers and speculators, and that these profits must always increase, no matter the cost to anyone else.

There is no need to tighten our belts. We're not living beyond our means - the means are being taken away from us. Workers, the unemployed, students, pensioners, and all ordinary people need to stick together and resist every single cut, and instead demand that the cost of the crisis is paid by those who caused it - the capitalist class.

Your home is under threat!

Government proposed cuts put 750,000 people at risk of losing their homes

Amongst other cuts, the government has proposed a massive cut in Housing Benefit. Across the country, all Housing Allowance rates will be reduced, to cover only the cheapest 30% of rent in each area. All of the allowance will go down: this means that hundreds of thousands of claimants will not be able to pay their rent.

As if this is not enough, all allowances will no longer be increased in line with rents, which means that in a few years most rents will be unaffordable.

On top of this, if a tenant is unemployed for more than a year, they will have their meagre and shrinking Housing Benefit cut by 10% - an indefinite sanction without any right of appeal, and without even bothering to establish whether their unemployment is their own fault or not.

Finally, those who are in social housing may see their security of tenure removed, so that if they can't afford their rent they can be easily evicted...

These cuts will severely affect both those who are in work and out of work. They will cause social cleansing of central areas and create ghettos. They will push individuals and families into spiralling debt, and eventually homelessness.

This attack will not hit only your 'lazy neighbour' but also you. There is no 'hard worker' and no 'scrounger' - all poor are equally 'scroungers' in the eyes of our millionaire politicians, who have wasted thousands of taxpayers' money to luxuriously house their ducks, and have paid billions of pounds to failing bankers.

Let's stop accusing each other of being 'scroungers' - the real scroungers are those who are condemning us to poverty and homelessness. Let's be together, against the rich, against the bankers, and against Rupert Murdoch and his Sun, before they, our real enemies, take us back to Dickensian times for the sake of their own wealth.

Upcoming Events

Thursday 21st October

Hove Town Hall, 3.30pm

Full council meeting. As part of Brighton Stop the Cuts Coalition we will be taking part in a demonstration against the cuts, & in support of the threatened Connexions workers.

Details tbc - see our blog for details

<http://brightonbenefitscampaign.wordpress.com>

Saturday 30 October

Local Stop the Cuts demonstration

12 noon - The Level Brighton

We will be taking part in a major demonstration organised by Brighton Stop the Cuts Coalition to protest against the cuts.

Every Thursday - 6pm

Brighton Benefits Campaign organising meeting 6pm, upstairs the Duke of Wellington, 70 Upper Gloucester Road.



Recovery or not - there aren't enough jobs!

As a result of the bankers' crisis unemployment has increased by more than a million in the UK. According to the government's own preferred statistics, there are now more than 2.5 million people looking for work and only 500,000 vacancies - five people chasing every job! The numbers made jobless by the economic recession would have been far higher if it had not been for the fact that many people in work have been put on short time working.

As if this was not enough the government is now preparing to make savage cuts to public services in order to pay for the bail out of the bankers. The government's newly established office for budget responsibility has estimated that these cuts will lead to over 700,000 more people losing their jobs in the public sector over the next four years and a further 600,000 job losses in the private sector.

The government claims that the economy is bouncing back and rapid economic growth in the private sector will soon be creating thousands of new jobs. For them what is important is to make sure the

unemployed are 'work ready' and prepared to take up the new jobs as they become created. This means workfare schemes and cuts in our benefits to prevent unemployment becoming a 'life style choice'.

With profits of banks and large corporations booming again, and their friends in the city awarding themselves huge bonuses, it may appear to this government of millionaires that the economy is doing fine. But many economists fear that that the government's public spending cuts are in danger of plunging the economy back into recession pushing unemployment up even further.

Even if the economy does continue to recover the number of jobs created is likely to small at first and those jobs which created will be mostly part-time and low paid. Even the Office for Budget Responsibility's own rather rosy forecast predicts unemployment will not fall back to anywhere near pre-crisis levels over the next five years.

Benefit cuts are against you - not 'other people'

While wasting large amounts of taxpayers' money to luxuriously house themselves and their ducks, our ministers tell us that they are on the side of British hard workers. They tell us, it is so unfair that we work hard while our unemployed neighbour has his curtains drawn in the morning, and it is for this reason that they will cut unemployment benefits.

But there is something that they don't tell you: that obliging other people to get any job, however badly paid, is not going to improve your own life.

If benefits get cut, a tide of desperate people will be available to work longer, harder, for any ridiculous pay. Your employers will find an army of people at their doors, willing to do your job for less.

Desperate people will not mind if you are sacked and replaced, if the alternative is their own starvation. Your wage will go down - or be given to someone else. Your work hours will go up. You will have to watch out, as anybody may stab in your back for your job. And one day you will regret that your neighbour's curtain is open in the morning, when he, or someone who was on the dole like him, gets your job for half the pay...

Do not listen to ministers and their rich business mates - they gain from us competing for a slice of bread and hating each other. The benefit system is never against you, it is in your interest, even when the giro cheque is paid to someone else.



'We wait for people to be miraculously healed, then we take away their incapacity benefit'

ESA – A Sick Joke

Employment Support Allowance fails to meet claimants needs

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is the sickness benefit introduced in October 2008 which will eventually replaced Incapacity Benefit (IB). According to the government's plans, all IB claimants will have to be reassessed, starting from March 2011.

The new test is designed to be extremely difficult to pass and to move sickness benefit claimants onto Jobseeker's Allowance. Unfortunately for the claimant, their new assessment is made through use of a computer program, the Logic Integrated Medical Assessment (LiMA), run by IT medical company Atos Healthcare for profit. As we explain in our blog, the application of this cheap computerised system to medical examinations makes the test harder to pass, with results that range from the inexplicable to the disingenuous (for further details see <http://tiny.cc/iar8m> .

As if the test is not hard enough, the DWP's 'Health Work and Wellbeing Directorate' has recently proposed to make it even harder! A report of October 2009 and a final Technical Review of March 2010 have recommended the abolition of testing in a number of mental health activities, which previously granted points to claimants. The reason? To avoid 'inappropriate double scoring' (sic). According to the proposals, we will be also fit for work if we are not able to walk but can 'mobilise' in a wheelchair; or if we cannot pick up things with our hand but can wedge them between our

arm and body; or if we cannot hear but we can 'understand a simple message, such as the location of a fire escape'. Backache sufferers will not have any excuse: the activity of bending and kneeling, the report says, is 'not necessarily an activity for functioning in the workplace'.

The harshness of the approach of the Atos doctors described above has extremely sinister overtones. It undermines the principles of medicine and ignores the advice of GPs and other healthcare professionals who know the claimant better than a doctor at a 20 minute computer generated interview who has never met the claimant before.

However these reforms are examples of government by tabloid editors, who foam at the mouth about 'benefit cheats' and 'welfare scroungers' while ignoring the big fish; millionaire tax evaders and bankers' bonuses. How far Express, Mail, and Sun readers will go along with the ravings of these papers when they themselves are hit by the misfortunes of ill health, redundancies, and unemployment and are forced to languish on benefits remains to be seen. It is also crass stupidity on behalf of the government; in the midst of a recession, taking ill people and forcing them to look for work, so artificially bumping up the unemployment statistics. Watch those figures rise above the magical 3 million and the popularity of the government plummet accordingly.

Brighton Benefits Campaign is a group of workers & claimants, who have joined together to resist the new assaults on the benefits system.

We stand for:

- An end to all forced labour & 'work for your benefit' schemes**
- Benefit levels to be raised to an adequate standard of living**
- Investment in public services to create socially useful jobs to fight unemployment.**

We meet every Thursday at 6pm at the Duke of Wellington Upper Gloucester Road Brighton. Join us in fighting back!

<http://brightonbenefitscampaign.wordpress.com>