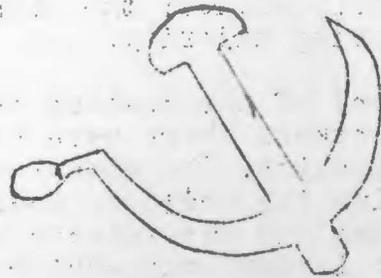


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SOCIAL WORK, LIKE CHARITY, BEGINS AT HOME

Finsbury Library hall (capacity 165) was full to overflowing on December 18th to hear opinions on the reorganisation of social service work in Islington.

Briefly, the council's plans involve scrapping the existing 10 teams working from 10 area offices; and replacing them by 13 teams and 3 specialised teams working from 3 divisional offices. The 13 new teams would make use of sub-offices which would not be manned full-time.

The argument advanced in favour by the Director of Social Services, John Rea Price, was that the 3 new offices would be manned all the time. There would be a cut down in the numbers of supervisory and middle management attempting at present to man the 10 offices. There would be more staff for direct contact with the public. The Director asked the audience where the sub-offices should be.

The audience was not impressed. They liked the system exactly as it is. Some said that more definite plans should have been put forward. Others said the plans were all cut and dried. Typical was Charlie Raymond, aged 30, who said he would have to go further to pay his telephone bill.

The chairperson, Councillor Ogilvy-Webb, denied that the plans would save money. This was not very intelligent. An official document envisages £140,000 savings on staff in a full year.

Councillor Hyams said that the majority of those present were clients of the social services. Public meetings tended to attract interested parties. Indeed, judging by the speakers from the floor, nearly all those present appeared to be either social workers from Islington or elsewhere, associated voluntary workers, or clients. The rest did not want to state their names, occupations, or addresses.

They all gave the impression that the social services were to be

drastically pruned; the plans were finally referred back by an overwhelming majority.

At the end of the meeting the Deputy Director was asked how many social workers there were now and how many were envisaged after the reorganisation. The answer was 97 now and at least 115 afterwards. This, plus the savings, would be obtained by streamlining middle management and supervisory posts, ie, by cutting back on positions for team leaders and senior social workers.

To quote a leaflet issued by Islington NALGO (their trade union), "Team leaders, besides doing some social work themselves, provide vital support, supervision and leadership to their staff". Or, as the discussion made clear, they might be out "in the community", they might be in the area office ready to drink a cup of coffee with a troubled client, or they might be somewhere else.

Team leaders, senior social workers, etc, provide a fine avenue for promotion for the ordinary social worker to what are basically well-paid, self-regulated, office jobs. A saving of £140,000 while expanding staff from 97 to 115 will cut down drastically on that avenue for promotion. The temptation to play on people's justified distrust of the council must be overwhelming. Even when it means telling someone he will have to go further to pay his telephone bill.

The only question that remains to be answered is how they got all those clients along. Outside the hall were three social services department buses and minibuses plus a large ambulance also belonging to the department. These were soon engaged in ferrying the audience back home.

UNFAIR TO TEACHERS?

A teacher friend does not like our continually referring to the productive working class. He says that all workers are productive and that our approach is divisive.

We should like him to consider the case of a factory worker earning £100 a week. This, like the other figures we shall give, will vary from worker to worker, of course.

Our worker, in common with the other workers in his factory, will have turned a certain amount of raw materials, outside components, and fuel into more valuable goods.

His share of the cost of raw materials, etc, is £450. His share of the finished goods is £600, factory gate price.

He has thus produced £150 worth of added value. From now on it can be taken that we are showing his share in the firm's outgoings.

Of the £150, £10 has gone towards the rent of the factory, £10 towards paying interest on bank loans to the firm, £10 put aside to replace worn-out machinery, and £20 will go to the shareholders. This leaves the worker's nominal pay at £100 a week.

From this £100 he will, on average, pay £25 income tax and national insurance contributions, leaving him with £75 take home pay.

If home is a council flat, he could be paying £20 a week in rent and rates.

Finally, Value Added Tax on goods he purchases take another £5 a week.

Out of the original £150, the state, the council, the landowners, the banks and the employers have taken £100.

(The state and the council have, of course, levied taxes and rates on the landlords', banks', and employers' share as well, but this does not affect the total).

A generous council may, perhaps, give the worker a small rebate on his rent and rates.

Our teacher friend would probably like the worker to regard the state and council rake-off as the worker's "social wage". Workers have the less attractive name of "stoppages" for taxes and national insurance contributions.

The bank employee has no reason to feel distressed by high interest rates. They increase the bank's profitability. Profitability is a very important factor in salary negotiations.

No doubt, the teacher or other government or council employee does not like having to pay high taxes and rates himself. But high taxes and rates generally mean more jobs, more money, and a greater chance of promotion for government employees.

Sometimes money is printed to pay government employees. The resulting inflation causes high interest rates. Inflation is also a tax by underhand means, since it reduces the value of the worker's pay.

Some of the dividends and the rents from the factory may well land up with an insurance company's investment department. The more profitable the insurance company, the better case its employees have got for higher salaries.

There is, therefore, a definite conflict of interest, not only between factory workers and the capitalist class, but also between factory workers and government and commercial employees.

As Marx put it over 100 years ago : the capitalist class can only maintain unproductive workers to the extent that it exploits productive workers.

This division is reflected in conversations in the common rooms and offices. Not much solidarity exists there with the factory workers. The pseudo-enlightened minority will blame the industrial crisis on disastrous monetarist policies. The majority will mutter that the workers don't want to work these days.

Our teacher friend went on to ask what happens when a factory worker gets the sack and goes into a government job. (This, of course, begs the question of whether he would have got the sack if industry were not being screwed for every penny and also of whether there are any government jobs available). Does he cease to be in the productive working class?

Marx said that, for a worker to be productive, he must produce value over and above his wages. Also what he produces must be a commodity.

As we saw above, Marx's view accords with the facts. If a factory worker wins the pools and becomes a big businessman, he becomes part of the capitalist class whether he wants to be or not. The productive working class is not an exclusive golf club, where the rules can be bent to admit people who want to join. If you're a productive worker, you're in that class. If not, you're out.

People from other classes can, of course, stand for the interests of the productive working class, even if it is against their own class interests. At present, there are very few such people.

CLAIMING DATES

OPEN MEETINGS at SACU, 152 Camden High St London NW1. 7pm,

Friday, 6th February : THE TRIAL OF THE GANG OF FOUR.

Friday, 6th March : CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

BACK TO FUNDAMENTALS or THE ONLY SOLUTION IS WORLD REVOLUTION

"Their crisis really is an international one, as the Tories say. The only fundamental solution to crisis and unemployment is to finish off this rotting system and establish working-class power running the economy on a planned and rational basis in the service of the people". (Practical advice for workers supplied by editorial of RCLB's paper "Class Struggle" for December).

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