TOTALLY INDYPENDENT
Newsletter of Haringey Solidarity Group
www.haringey.org.uk

"If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal." *Emma Goldman*

ELECTION SPECIAL!

PEOPLE POWER = REAL POLITICS

Is putting an 'X' on a piece of paper once every 5 years real politics? Is giving up our power to Political Parties, Councils and Parliament part of the problem, or part of the solution?

Everyone seems keen to improve things for themselves, their families and others. Many hope that voting for politicians - or indeed paying for lottery tickets, buying endless stuff, praying to God, or following the lives of celebrities - will make their lives better. But does it? What really counts is building up our communities and empowering ourselves where we live and work. That way we can all learn from and support each other, have a real say and make a difference to what's going on - and help make a better future for ourselves and everyone in the long term.

Over the last year, in Haringey alone, tens of thousands of local residents and workers have been involved in a wide range of positive collective activities and volunteering. There are in fact over 1,000 local community groups throughout Haringey! This includes local residents associations,



'Friends of Parks' groups, and street-based mutual aid groups; varied community campaigns and protests; single-issue and specific interest groups; community-run centres and projects; cultural, artistic and self-help groups; and local trades union branches. Everyone can and should take part in one or more of such inspiring collective activities.

Such groups are generally responding directly to their own and other people's real needs, and aim to build up people's awareness and self-confidence, share knowledge, and to spread useful information and ideas. They want to help to strengthen our communities in some way and are based on positive human values and democratic ways of working, as opposed to the way our society is currently based on profits and power.

Such groups and activities would be so much stronger and more effective in the long term if they linked up and supported each other, and explicitly promoted people power and collective decision-making as an alternative to capitalism and Government - the root causes of almost all of society's problems.

We therefore call on everyone to help build grassroots solidarity and power, and to work towards empowering people to together take control of their own lives, communities and workplaces around London, the UK and the world. Such real politics is logical, right, necessary and urgent.

Information on some local grassroots community networks, including the Haringey Community Action Network (which we in HSG are part of): https://www.haringeyfriendsofparks.org.uk/haringey_networks.php

POLITICAL PARTIES

SHOULD WE JOIN OR VOTE FOR THEM?

The mere fact that Political Parties exist today is not a sufficient reason for us to preserve them. The only legitimate reason for preserving anything is its usefulness or goodness. The evils of Political Parties are all too evident; therefore, the problem that should be examined is do they contain enough good to compensate for their evils and make their preservation desirable?

Do we need Political Parties to 'represent' people in Councils or Parliament? The answer is clearly 'no', not only because of the Parties' ideas and aims but also because Political Parties are top-down organisations where a small leadership dictates decisions for the majority. Moreover, electing so-called 'representatives' creates rulers and the ruled, perpetuating power imbalances.

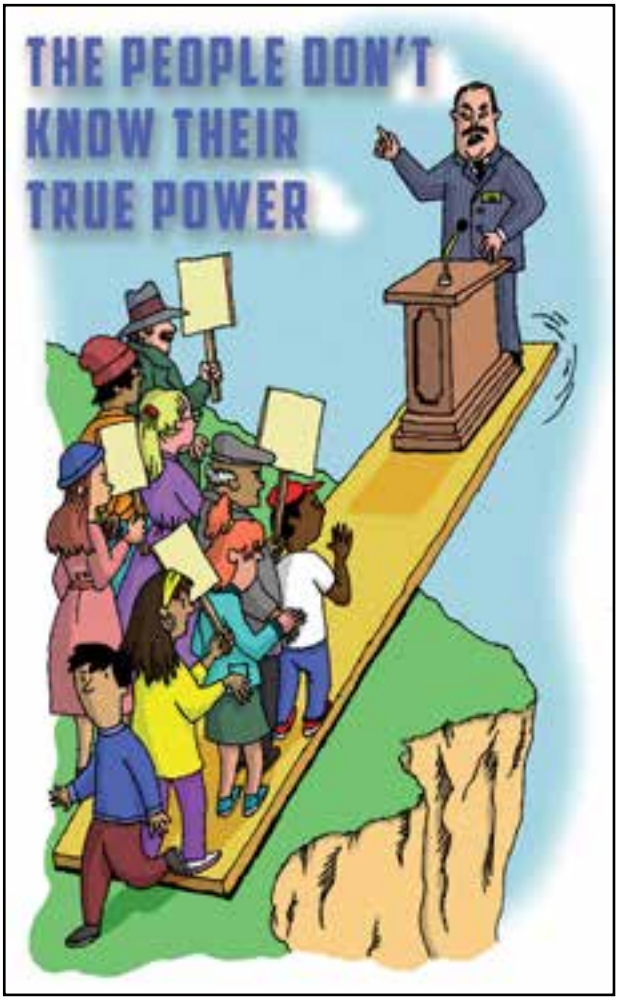
It is undoubtedly true that participating in Party politics and their election campaigns wastes energy, and it legitimises Councils and Governments and their power over us. We should work to achieve social change through grassroots organising and revolution - people taking direct control together of our lives - not voting. History shows that Political Parties - even radical ones - are generally absorbed and neutralised by the ruling class and its wider power structures, or their reformist efforts are destroyed, or they gain power and become a new tyranny.

Political Parties try to co-opt people's sense of truth and justice. Their public propaganda tends not to impart light, but to push a line and the organisation.

There is nothing more isolating and individualistic than voting once every 5 years. It is the act of one person in a booth by themselves - the total opposite of collective activity or struggle. The individual is alone before, during and after the act of voting. In contrast, collective or direct action by its very nature throws up new forms of organisation in order to manage and coordinate efforts and struggles for a better society.

Therefore, in a lot of ways, collective or direct action is a more effective means for people to have a say in society than voting is. Voting is a lottery - your preferred candidate may not get elected, in any case may not and cannot represent your real views, and all the time and energy put into supporting them is wasted. By being part of self-organised activity with others you can be sure that your work will offer some kind of results, and the experience you gain, the lessons learnt, and networks and connections built up in the process, cannot be taken away from you. Such positive collective grassroots community activities can be seen all around us throughout Haringey.

So instead of voting, its better to promote activity not apathy. Instead of spending our time urging people to vote for one set or another of organisations offering slightly different ways to manage capitalism and the existing power structures, we raise the option of choosing to free yourself, and to organise with others in your workplace, in your community, everywhere. This is something you cannot vote for - a new society run directly by and for people themselves.



Elections are not 'Democracy'

Voting for politicians and Political Parties to solve our problems is one of the greatest lies in history. The problem is actually the system itself, not who manages it. We need to change society from the bottom up, not the other way around.

Modern Political Parties were formed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, committed to maintaining a hierarchical and class-based capitalist society based on profit and privilege, inequality, injustice, and exploitation.

Only a minority had the right to vote at that time, with all women and the working classes excluded. It took long mass campaigns to win the vote for all adults. Yet the system remained basically the same because of the role of the rich and powerful who controlled, and still control, society's resources and all decision-making. The ruling class, whilst making some concessions when forced to by significant and militant movements, will not jeopardise their own survival.

Following the horrors of World War 2, the British Government faced massive public pressure and campaigns demanding a huge expansion of the welfare state. Health and education were made free, local public services expanded, Council housing built and rent controls imposed on private landlords, a range of key utilities and industries nationalised, and a benefits 'safety net' system created.



But these gains should have been secured under workers and public control, not under the control of local and national Government. Grassroots movements were co-opted by Political Parties and election strategies, resulting in Governmental power and capitalism being left intact.

Since the 1980s the post-war gains made have been been under relentless attack, and are being systematically dismantled. This is despite substantial opposition and protests from social movements, trade unions, and activists' networks.

At the local level, Councils manage many important local services, buildings and land. But Councils are the local arm of national government, are run as top-down enterprises, and are limited by ever-decreasing budgets for key services. Those who work for Councils, and those who use local services, have little or no say unless they organise themselves independently and take action. Services are being cut, privatised for profit, and public assets sold off.

If a genuinely progressive Party was to be elected, any manifesto aims seeking permanent real change would face relentless opposition from the wider establishment and so get watered down and junked. This can be clearly seen throughout the history of the Labour Party - despite the mass backing from trades unions and many social movements who put their faith in trying to 'capture' local Councils and Parliament.

Would the Greens or Your Party be any different? Illusions shattered can create disillusionment and demoralisation unless a real alternative strategy emerges. Those in power remain the rich and powerful, working together as a ruling class - corporations and financial institutions; the police, judges, security services and the military; landowners and billionaires - none of whom are elected.

We need to take another path. People everywhere need to organise themselves to fight for their needs, empower themselves, and ultimately to take direct control of their own neighbourhoods, workplaces and all decision-making. This 'direct democracy' is about changing society from the bottom up, not the other way around.

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY



Many people are not happy with the way our government and local councils are run, but seem to think that they are a necessary evil and without them the fabric of society will fall away leading to chaos and disorder. We think differently and would argue that the world is already in chaos and disorder because of the systems put in place by the State and those with power.

We would like to see a world based upon equality and co-operation, where people give according to their ability and receive according to their needs. Where work is fulfilling and where creativity is encouraged, where decision-making is open to everyone with no hierarchies, and where the environment is valued and respected in its own right rather than exploited.

One way to achieve this would be through a co-operative system, working together with others rather than competing with them.

Normal businesses provide profits to shareholders and capitalists, but co-ops are part of creating a different type of society based on community links, self-help and mutual aid. They enable people to follow the principles of co-operation and fairness even in a society based on competition and exploitation.

Co-operatives were formed by workers in the 19th century who set up shops to break the monopoly of the large factory bosses supplying overpriced, low quality food to workers. The shops not only provided good food at a decent price, they also provided fair and equitable conditions for those working there.

Nowadays there are many different types of co-ops, including many in Haringey. Here are just a few:

Housing co-ops: a group of people who collectively control and manage their own housing, without the need of landlords or their agents. Making all the decisions together like setting the rent levels and maintaining the properties. **Workers' co-ops:** businesses owned and controlled by the people who work there, not run by a boss. Only employees can be members of the co-op, and there's no shareholders taking away the surplus. **Social Centres:** meeting and socialising space for the community. **Consumer co-ops:** people get together to get food and consumer goods cheaply by bulk buying. **Marketing co-ops:** small producers get together to market their products collectively for a better deal. There are even co-operatively run **shops and pubs.**

There are thousands of examples of successful co-operatives of all kinds and sizes throughout the UK and indeed all around the world.

Co-operation is much better than controlling or exploiting people - why can't the whole of our society be run in that way?

Some info about UK Co-ops:
https://www.radicalroutes.org.uk
and Food Co-ops:
https://cooperation.town

WHO WE ARE

In 1991, Haringey Solidarity Group (HSG) emerged from the Anti-Poll Tax campaign. We wanted to create a long-term, vibrant, non-hierarchical group, unlike political parties where ambitions and posturing displace real politics.

We believe in ridding ourselves of the current system which places profit and power before people's needs. This involves getting organised, fighting back and collectively taking those decisions which affect our daily lives. We think people should take control of their community and workplace struggles, support each other, encourage practical solidarity, build the necessary skills and knowledge for these struggles and generate strong, permanent, grassroots networks.

Many of us are involved with local residents', community and campaign groups within the borough. We support workers in dispute, campaigns against public service cuts and threatened community amenities. We are active on environmental, housing and claimants' issues and resist state controls.

Come and share your views at our monthly meeting. We welcome your involvement and with practical activities including distributing this newsletter and producing other materials including posters and leaflets.

FIND OUT MORE AND GET INVOLVED

Visit: **www.haringey.org.uk**

Befriend us on **Facebook**

Write to:
PO Box 2474, London N8

Email: **info@haringey.org.uk**