

## **INTRODUCTION**

All the benefit cuts are an attack on the poor, a high percentage of whom are from ethnic minorities and are disabled or sick. Benefit claimants are the current scapegoats for the recession.

Hysteria over relaxation of controls for Rumanians and Bulgarians contributed to UKIP success in Eastleigh, and the rise of right wing party likely to mirror Golden Dawn.

Daniel Gauntlett a single homeless man died of hypothermia whilst sleeping rough on 23 Feb 2013 in Aylesford Kent. He was only 35.

From April 2013 all benefit claims nationwide will be capped at a total per week of £350 for a single person and £500.00 for a couple including Housing Benefit. This will particularly bite in London where Housing costs are higher.

## **HOUSING BENEFIT : BEDROOM TAX**

In force from April 2013 – affects both able bodied and disabled

Deductions from Housing Benefit if empty bedroom for over 30 weeks per annum.

14% for 1 bedroom, 25% for more than 1 bedroom per week

2 Children under 10 of any sex can share, 2 children over 10 of same sex can share

Attack on the poor which will lead to evictions and rent rises to compensate for loss of income

Will lead to rise in homelessness and dispersal of the homeless outside London (where rents are cheaper)

Courts will be in chaos

Private landlords will not accept HB tenants

### **Exemptions:**

- pensioners (aged between 60 and 65, depending on eligible date to claim Pension Credit)
- carers if not resident with disabled person

### **Campaigning Points**

- abolition because it will lead to evictions due to rent arrears and increased homelessness
- increase exemption category to include resident carers
- Increase exemption category to include dependants in armed forces
- groups of tenants to write to social landlords agreeing to downsize: possible Defence to Court action but may also be offered smaller property.
- consider ways of working with Court staff and “soft” Judges to refuse Possession Orders

- mobilise outside properties when Bailiffs coming to evict

### EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT ALLOWANCE (ESA) Drafted by Labour

In force from April 2011: £60 million so far spent on appeals

Tories introduced much harsher Capability Assessment Test run by ATOS in November 2011

Requires continuous submission of sick notes from GP or consultant

All claimants subject to ATOS assessments after initial 13 weeks

Need to score 15 points on Work Capability Assessment Form or lose ESA – most score 0 by ATOS which proves working to a quota – much more likely to score between 13 and 15.

Pending appeal against ATOS refusal can only receive reduced ESA of £71 per week

No exemptions

Pending re-assessment of either reduced ESA or JSA claimants have no money and Housing Benefit (HB) frequently stopped pending proof of income leading to rent arrears

Even if successful on appeal, face same ATOS any time after 13 weeks after appeal.

1 client whose husband died 3 weeks after receiving 0 points ATOS assessment

### Campaigning Points

- ATOS employees are not Doctors and they work to a refusal quota (usually give 0 score)
- ATOS will franchise work back to NHS to administer PIPs which will replace DLA (budget reduction aim of 20%)
- Claimants cannot survive on £71 per week: many have multiple debts and benefit deductions
- HB has discretion to continue payment on nil income assessments
- Claimants are dying as a result of hardship caused by these reforms

### Work with DISABLED PEOPLE AGAINST CUTS (DPAC)

### COUNCIL TAX

From 1 April people in receipt of Council Tax Benefit will have to pay 10% towards their bill.

### Campaigning points:

- Durham County Council are protecting claimants for next 12 months by cutting council tax discount on empty and second homes, and charging 150% Council tax for properties empty for more than 2 years

## **UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

This is an integrated means-tested benefit to replace all other benefits for people over 18 and below pension credit age who are unemployed or in low paid work.

It has all party support.

Pilots will be rolled out in the North East and North West from April 2013.

**Claims can only be made on line or in exceptional circumstances by phone.**

**Entitlements will be worked out by an IT system.**

**It includes Housing Benefit, which will no longer be administered by local authorities**

The only additional benefits which can be claimed are contributory JSA and ESA and Child Benefit.

It will be administered by a single agency (Department of Work and Pensions) with on line claimant accounts

Claimants will be assessed monthly in arrears and paid directly into a claimant's bank account.

Backdating of claims can only be for the maximum of 1 month.

There is no provision for payment pending appeals.

There are lower disabled child additions and no adult disability premiums

If the claimant is self-employed, UC imposes a notional minimum earnings of £1400 gross per month

### **Campaigning points**

**Persuade the Labour Party to withdraw support for Universal Credit**

**Identify defects in the pilots and try to stop them being rolled out nationally**

**Collate statistics about claimants without access to the Internet and Bank accounts with a view to extending discretion for paper applications**

**Similarly collate statistics on hardship for re-instatement of reduced (£71 per week) benefit pending appeal**

**No Legal Help/Legal Aid for benefit advice from 1 April 2013 – Law Centre loses 40% of income**

### **Campaigning Points**

Press for the re-instatement of Legal Help for preparation of Appeals to the first Tier Tribunal