

Review: “In Place of Austerity – a programme for the people”

October 2017

“It is essential that we, together with the Trade Unions, continue to build the mass movement further to force the Tories out of office, and to help elect and sustain a future anti-austerity progressive government – which, of course, would be under fierce attack by the bankers, big business monopoly corporations and their pet politicians and media. This is the clear aim of the People’s Assembly.”

In its strongest ever policy statement and plan of action, the recently published pamphlet, *“In Place of Austerity – a programme for the people”*, The People’s Assembly reasserts its position right at the front of the very widespread view that the Tories are not fit to continue in office, and the fast growing awareness that our movement - the People’s Assembly and our Trade Unions - needs to go beyond protest to organising to bring them down.

Tracing the origins of austerity to the policies of government following the 2008 financial and economic crisis - which they claimed to be aimed at “deficit reduction”- the policy statement says, *“Many people now say that austerity policies have failed – and indeed deficit targets are routinely “missed”, and there has been no debt reduction... in fact it has steadily grown from under 40% of GDP in 2008 to just under 90% in 2017. But the real aim of austerity was to stabilise the post crisis economy in favour of the bankers and big business billionaires, raising the rate of profit at the expense of the working class. In that they have succeeded, and will continue to do so, if we let them.”*

The opening section of the pamphlet pulls together very useful evidence and statistics – from pay and pensions to jobs and working conditions, from privatisation of services to community infrastructure, from benefit cuts to taxation policy, from NHS and State education to the growth of bogus or enforced “self-employment”, from wealth gap and poverty to housing and transport.... and much more.

The second section argues for a *“People’s Programme”* – a comprehensive and coherent set of practical economic and social policies, first of all *“to expand our public services... and to support and modernise Britain’s industrial base rather than sacrificing it on the altar of financial speculation”*

It goes on to promote *“Policies for sustainable growth”* including directed capital investment and public ownership – specifically of the banks, energy, water, post, telecommunications and transport - and democratic control over taxation, monetary policy and interest rates. It advocates a *“broadly based, sustainable industrial economy with one million anti-global warming green jobs, by developing a rational link between R&D, investment in plant and productive capacity, vocational training and integrated strategic economic planning at local, regional and national levels”*

Turning to worker’s rights that go with this approach to the economy, the policy statement advocates new Trade Union and Labour Law, as researched and detailed by People’s Assembly’s partner, the Institute of Employment Rights. This includes legislation guaranteeing Trade Union freedom to organise, rebuilding collective bargaining and collective agreements across all sections of the economy, limiting the export of capital and jobs, and state intervention and public ownership to support essential industries and jobs within them, threatened by capitalist neglect and crisis.

The principles of fairness at work are examined – demanding real enforcement of equal pay, an increased minimum wage, an end to pay freezes, increased quality vocational training, investment in jobs for workers with disabilities preventing the super exploitation of migrant labour, abolishing zero hours contracts and precarious working.

There is recognition that much of the *“People’s Programme”* could not be achieved under European Union rules. *“Many people who voted against BREXIT did so because they feared what the next steps might be in austerity Britain. But many who voted to leave the European Union did so because of its fierce imposition of austerity economics and politics across Europe, its privatisation and anti-union directives & court judgements, and EU punishment of the people of countries that dared to vote for anti-austerity governments. We need to unite those who voted either way in the referendum in favour of a “People’s BREXIT” – and integrate this into our growing movement”*

Can it be afforded? Clearly in 21st Century Britain of huge wealth and income disparity – it is a question, the pamphlet says, not of whether the wealth exists, but of wealth distribution. It puts forward a 6 point progressive tax

plan, raising revenue for the needs of ordinary people by taxing the super-rich and corporate monopolies, ending tax havens and cracking down on tax evasion and avoidance. It also introduces “Quantitative Easing For The People”, an interesting approach... expressly forbidden by EU financiers in EU Article 123... but now a real possibility.

This short pamphlet is indispensable to anti-austerity campaigners and trade union members. It small enough in size to fit in your bag or back pocket – but large enough in analysis, concepts, policies, hard facts – and fighting strategy - to really contribute to the struggle and really help change minds.

As it reminds us, *“We need to pull people together to take on the government, and the big monopolies and finance interests who are behind them and who are so determined to turn the screw on us. As Frances O’Grady, General Secretary of the TUC said at the founding conference of the People’s Assembly “We are facing a class war”. We know that this will not end in a draw. Either we defeat those who are attacking us, or they will inflict a defeat on us. Right now there are great opportunities... together, we need to seize the time!”*

Buy or order copies of “In Place of Austerity – a programme for the people”

£2 + postage individual copy, or free electronic copy

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