

2012

HAVING FABIAN NEWSLETTER

October – November 2012

In this edition; Reviews of recent meetings, including the talks given by

Chris Leslie MP
Former MEP Robert Evans
Labour Party General Secretary Iain McNicol
Plus the Societies recent visit to *City Hall*
Ray Harris writes on St Georges
Council Tax Benefit changes

Having Fabian Society
Newsletter Volume 2 Edition 12



HAVERING FABIAN NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 2 EDITION 12 October November 2012

Introduction

Welcome to the new edition of the Havering Fabian Newsletter. This issue will give a summary of some recent meetings, an introduction to meetings to come, and some opinions on current political issues.

As opinions are the lifeblood of politics, we welcome a reply to any of the articles. The Fabian Society exists to promote political debate, both within and outside the Labour Party. Progressive politics extends beyond the Labour Party and contributions from the Labour Movement as a whole are welcome.

Attendances at recent meetings have increased, and the quality of speakers remains excellent. We are glad to see a number of new people attending the meetings.

This Edition

This edition includes a report on recent meetings, and details of future events. We have continued to have a series of excellent and high profile speakers.

London City Hall visit Tuesday 10th July 2012



At the invitation of Assembly Member for City & East London, John Biggs, ten members, including one councillor, observed question time with Boris Johnson who was being questioned by the Assembly Members. Susan Jeary, John's PA, made us feel very welcomed and arranged for the start of events to have a welcoming announcement for HAVERING FABIAN SOCIETY... which might just

have been what triggered Boris, later on in proceedings, to throw his fist into the air and declare “ Up Capitalism!“.

Although various Assembly members were tenacious in trying to get an answer to their questions, Boris enjoyed a conviction that he had answered the question, which clearly was very frustrating for those Assembly Members. John briefly met up with us afterwards and offered to come and visit our society.....which he will be doing on **Friday 15th February 2013.**

July Meeting -Chris Leslie MP



The meeting with Chris Leslie MP was at a venue new to our society, St Joseph's Social Hall, St. Mary's Lane. It was found to be a very pleasant venue much appreciated by those who had not been there before.

Our guest speaker introduced himself *personally* to most of the 37 present, which engendered conviviality to the meeting. Chris showed himself not only to be very well informed on matters of national economic but also capable of making a difficult area to comprehend much more understandable. This was a point reiterated in feedback received after the meeting, and Chris certainly exuded confidence in his role as shadow Treasury spokesperson.

Addressing the matter of the 2008/9 banking crisis, the issue of the blame game, making it out to be the Labour Government's fault and disregarding the global nature of the crisis, was discussed. This crisis will be repeated *again and again* unless radical reforms are achieved.

Banks are capitalising on their customers' reluctance to change their bank account with its plethora of Directed Debit / Standing Orders **but** the technology to do so is readily available and the banks need to operate in a more competitive, open market. The issue of the Coop Bank taking over some high street Lloyds TSB banks was raised.

Banking is a modern utility much as water and energy supplies are and the high street banking industry needs to be regarded as such.

The talk was followed by what the speaker himself felt were very discerning questions / comments and Chris provided considerable clarification on these issues, including...

... “*To whom do we owe the monies?*”

... Reference to a **Financial Transaction Tax** (Robin Hood or Tobin Tax)

...Bankers exit from Sweden in response to new regulations;

...The rationale of Gordon Brown’s good intent in removing the Bank of England from political control and thus prohibiting further manipulation of national finances prior to an election.

The summation on the meeting was that “*Greed got out of control due to regulatory failure*”.

September meeting - Labour in coalition?



This was the first time our society had a debate without a visiting speaker. The topic debated was that, in the event of a hung parliament, should Labour seek a coalition partner, or try to govern as a minority administration?

Councillor Keith Darvill presented the case for and Alderman Wilf Mills presented the case against a coalition. Both spoke from a wealth of personal experiences and thus were very informative but both conceded some ground to the other viewpoint, indicative of how much of a grey area it really is and that each situation has to be looked at on its own merits.

Further discussion lead to clarification that, in a coalition ministerial positions would be offered to all parties involved, whilst in a minority administration this would not happen. There was also concern as to who would be acceptable as coalition partners...UKIP, Nationalist parties, Liberal Democrats.

It was mooted that UKIP may become the third party in a future election and this is an issue that could be raised with John Cryer MP at the

forthcoming November meeting. Keith did point out that all political parties are in effect coalitions.

After the debate, a show of hands indicated a clear majority would prefer a minority administration but a further show of hands showed this would not have been the view prior to the current coalition! It was firmly felt that each situation has to be decided on the circumstances prevailing at the time, especially regards the arithmetic and the personalities involved... but coalition could spell giving up your principles and moral stance!

October meeting



Former Labour MEP Robert Evans was the speaker on 15th October. The subject was the forthcoming American election. In the previous election, Robert had taken part in the Obama campaign. He had been assigned to welcome the press at an airport while waiting for ex-President Clinton's plane to arrive. After waiting five hours, the ex-President's plane arrived first, leaving him feeling slightly unsure of how he had helped.

The forthcoming election would be close, bringing echo's of the Bush \ Gore election in 2000 when Gore won more votes but the electoral college delivered a Bush victory. Robert described the Electoral College system, and how in a close election the performance in a handful of key states would determine the result. These were Nevada, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida and New Hampshire.

The opinion polls at the date of the meeting would give Obama the election 271- 267, so the election is on a knife edge.¹

The larger states have more votes, but with the election so close, every seat matters. Robert went through the latest polls in each of the key states and had researched the key issues. In most polls, Obama's vote was down from 2008, with the Republican's ahead in some states. Particularly interesting was Ohio, which had voted for every winning candidate post war bar 1960 (when they voted for Nixon over Kennedy) – Obama was

¹ . (For an analysis of what happens if there is a tie see the following link <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/07/26/politics/electoral-college-tie/index.html>)

2% ahead. The 2000 election hinged on Florida where the result was close and hinged on "hanging chads". Gore won most votes nationally but was denied by the Supreme Court which had a 3-2 Republican majority.

Political nerds everywhere will recall or have read that the 1960 election also ended with the winner (Kennedy) obtaining fewer votes than the runner up – the Republican approach was to concede rather than prolong the process which in part explains why the Democrats reciprocated in 2000.

Arizona appeared to be going against the trend, with the Democrat vote 2% higher than 2008; this reflected the change in population, with more Latino voters. This highlighted another issue- the polarisation of some sections of the community – in 2008 Latino voters were 71% Democrat, while Black voters were 95% Democrat. Republicans has a 9% lead in 2008 in male voters. Such divisions can drive policy, although at this point we thought a debate on the Middle East would best take place on another occasion.

During the questions, Robert was asked who he thought would win, and he went for Obama – by the time you read this you will almost certainly know the result, let's hope he is \ was right.

If this is the result, Obama will almost certainly face a Republican congress and the rows about the deficit will continue. The American system often sees a President of one party checked by a Congress of the other as a result of the midterm elections – a vote for change that then gets stymied by gridlock.

An interesting night and we wish Robert well in his forthcoming campaign for Police Commissioner in Surrey.

Ray Harris writes on St Georges Hospital



The local NHS Trust is consulting about future options for the St George's Hospital site. As with all consultation exercises they outline their priorities and ask for views on those, without inviting alternative options and then go ahead with what they intended in the first place.

So what should be the future of the St George's Hospital site? It is historically a site associated with the needs of elderly people and many people have memories of their relatives spending their last days there. It is an idyllic setting in green belt land and is centrally placed for connections with local transport hubs. The likelihood is that the Trust will be 'encouraged' by government to sell off the site for housing development.

This is an obvious example of where the Council, if it got its act together, could make a real difference. Havering has the largest elderly population in London and it is growing. The obvious future for the site is to provide an older persons' village in much the same way as they do in countries like Norway. If retirement homes, together with sheltered housing, a day centre and a residential home were to be built on the site, together with retention of a medical facility, there would be great opportunity for mutual support schemes such as those that operate elsewhere in Europe.

The idea would be that flats and houses could be built for purchase and rent by people at or near retirement. The skills that they have accrued over a working life could be put to use in offering mutual support to each other and to those less able because of age or infirmity. They would become part of an integrated local community, remaining active and well placed to enjoy the benefits of the mutuality of the community, avoiding the need for loneliness or lack of support because of advancing age or infirmity. All of the facilities that they would need such as medical services, residential support, day centre for socialising, organised activities and meals and a care home for residential or respite care, could all be available as and when needed within one community. The beauty of it is that so much of the support network necessary to sustain it would

be available from within the community itself and people would be in familiar surroundings and with people they know as they advanced in years and dependency. I am sure that as in other parts of Europe, community voluntary groups and churches, etc would be keen to be involved.

The scheme I saw in operation in Norway involved couples moving into the community being introduced to the heart of the community and being made aware of the networks and invited to join in or not as they wished. The beauty of it was that those who became active in supporting the facilities as volunteers became familiar with the surroundings and often became beneficiaries later of the facilities they helped provide. In other cases couples who moved in and later lost a partner were familiar with the support network and became more involved and were not isolated or left feeling lonely.

Some will say this is NHS land and cannot be given over to wider community use. Yet David Cameron is saying that communities should have a wider say in what is built and asserts that local councils have it within their powers to develop neighborhood plans. I am confident that if Havering Council produced a Development Plan designating the area for such use and put its foot down about any alternative use outside of the constraints of the existing developed footprint, the minds of those in the NHS would soon be concentrated! In any event the land is a national asset and in these days of so-called joined up government the Minister for Local Government should be able to agree with his counterpart in the Department of Health a partnership approach to the future use of the site or an appropriate financial transaction at government level to transfer ownership to the local Council.

There are now some experiments elsewhere in this country which are showing that such schemes work and that there are benefits to be had from them for older people as well as benefits to government and the wider community. People being able to live independent lives in their own homes with a supportive community for longer, feeling that they have a purpose in life, definitely live a more fulfilled and contented life.

However, with a Tory led government determined to dispense with planning approval, prepared to sacrifice the green belt and allow open season for the construction industry would our council, controlled by the same party as government, be prepared to take a bold stand to achieve it? It could not only be seen as innovative and part of Mr. Cameron's big

society, but also makes so much sense. They could make strong representation to government as well as encouraging and promoting partnerships and making the proposition attractive for developers. I submit that it is time for our voice to be heard and would advocate a local campaign around achieving a real benefit not just for the local area, or even Hornchurch, but for the borough as a whole. I would welcome other members' views and an opportunity for a debate about the merits of the proposal.

Ray Harris is former Labour Leader of Havering Council.

Council Tax Benefit reform



The government welfare reforms include a reform of Council Tax benefit that's technical, but is going to have consequences on a par with the Poll Tax. Councils receive subsidy on the Council Tax paid, equal to the value paid out. This is to be replaced by a grant based on 90% of the subsidy paid out. The remaining 10% is either a shortfall for the Council to fund – meaning more cuts – or passed on to those in receipt of benefit. Pensioners are protected, so those in receipt of benefit must meet the difference.

Government knows this will be unpopular, so the implementation will be passed over to Councils.

Most London Councils are passing this on rather than making further reductions in services. So a large number of people who don't pay Council Tax now will be required to do so - the poorest members of society again paying for the failure of the banks while Starbucks get away with a derisory tax bill. "We are all in it together", remember! It is worth pointing out that nationally, Council Tax benefit is not taken up by all those entitled to it, so if your family or you are affected, make sure you claim.

October –Iain McNicol



The speaker for the second October meeting was Iain McNicol. Iain was appointed Labour Party General Secretary at Annual Conference in September 2011.

Iain began by setting out his objective. Previous defeated Labour governments had spent 13 years (1951-64) and 18 years (1979-97) in opposition. It was vital to not spend two three or even four parliaments in opposition but get back first time. History suggested this would not be an easy task. The Shadow cabinet were up to the challenge and their drive indicated the party's desire to avoid splits. It is key to develop policies and a vision for 2015 (while keeping an eye on the possibility of an earlier election).

To this end Ed Milliband had set three areas

Rebuilding the economy

Rebuilding Society

Rebuilding politics

The discussion was around how we can rebuild politics. Milliband appreciated that trust in politicians was low, and the only way to gain trust is to get elected and deliver on promises.

Locally, the GLA result had been better than expected with a much reduced majority. The key going forward is to re-connect with the electorate. During May the party had over 2 million conversations on the doorstep in the run up to the elections. The party needs to heed the conversation and listen to the issues that matter on the doorstep. Local campaigns can make a difference and bring change on local issues even when Labour is not in power.

It was depressing to hear “politics doesn't matter” – it clearly does and we need to re-connect and build trust. This has to happen at a local level. The London campaign had increased from 8 to 12 the Labour members on the GLA and this was but one example.

Iain had been involved in Brentford and Isleworth campaign from 1994 to 97, which resulted in the seat returning a Labour MP in 1997.

Operation “toe-hold” had been run on similar lines when local campaigning along the south coast in areas with no Labour representation- Poole, Purbeck, Dorset. These started with no Labour Councillors – but campaigns with local activists built campaigns at a local community level to deliver some wins and led to some gains at parliamentary level in 1997.

This approach fell away post ’97 as the party moved toward a centralized control approach in 2001, 2005, and 2010.

The approach now was to rebuild via local campaigning, and use this as a stepping stone over the next two and a half years. The Party should have listened more to members – on Housing and social issues we did not act – for example house building was minimal.

Ed Milliband is keen on wider involvement in policy development, and in opening this out to both Town Hall and online debates, on health, education and housing.

Iain saw a need to do things differently from the recent past:

1. More candidates should be selected earlier in key seats – in 2010 many selections were left until the last 2 or 3 months giving little time to build campaigns in the local community. In an environment with general distrust of politicians, good active PPCs, MPs and Councillors can make a difference.
2. Organisers – 200 local organisers working to build community engagement will build a bigger capacity to deliver elections.

Iain had been the agent in Wimbledon in 2001, when there were 14 Labour councillors- these were a key part of the campaign team and fed in issues. In the 2002 Council elections all seats were lost, so in 2005 the link to the community was broken, and the seat was lost. Locally, with 5 councillors out of 54 in Havering, there was a need to build a base in 2014 to build for 2015 and beyond.

The key is to get engaged and involved. Party members will know people who share the Party’s values and vision, and share its objectives. Ask them to join. There have been 70,000 new members since 2010.

The Party’s base is important going forward. It will be stronger with more advocates who get involved. The more members, the more help in target seats, and more conversations that can take place with the

community. Local campaigns may be able to deliver seats in the Council chamber.

Elections are not just about delivering leaflets and voter identification- the Party needs to be more ambitious than this. There are 5 by elections pending – Manchester, Cardiff, Corby, Croydon and Middleborough. The Party could well win all of these.

Labour should not wait for the Government to lose the next election but campaign and give the electorate positive reasons why Labour should win.

Iain then took questions from the audience – oddly again 37. An excellent evening and good to see the Party officials coming into the community- this was the first time anyone can remember when the Labour Party General Secretary has come to Havering.

The PPC for Thurrock Polly Billington was then introduced to the meeting, and we hope to invite her to speak at a meeting in the near future. Her predecessors Oona McDonald and Andrew Mackinley, have both spoken at previous meeting of the society, and we look forward to many visits from Polly when she is elected to parliament.

Future Meetings



The November meeting will see the return of John Cryer MP for Leyton and Wanstead. John has been a frequent speaker at the Society, having been MP for Hornchurch from 1997 to 2005. The meeting will be held at St John's and St. Mathews Southend Road South Hornchurch, starting at 7.30pm.

Planning ahead, the Society AGM will be on Friday 15th February 2013. Details of the venue are still to be finalized, but will almost certainly be Fairkytes in Hornchurch. The speaker will be GLA member John Biggs.

The Society is looking to organise another fundraising dinner, after the success of last year's event at the Bekash in Romford. Please contact David Marshall if interested.

If you go to the Bekash mention you are a Havering Fabian and get 10% discount off your food bill.

We value your input!

The Society invites speakers on a range of subjects; if you would like us to invite speakers on a particular subject let us know and we will try to oblige.

The Society has a policy of rotating meetings around the Borough; if you need a lift or if you know of any suitable venues we could use, contact David Marshall.

Articles for the newsletter are always welcome.

Local Fabian Society Contacts

		Contact
Chair Councillor Keith Darvill	Secretary David Marshall	David Marshall
Membership Secretary Mary Breading		31 Vicarage Road Hornchurch RM12 4AS 01708 441189 david.c.marshall@talk21.com
Vice Chair Mike Flynn	Treasurer Dave Baldock	
Committee Members		
Cecile Duerinckx	Ed Glasson	
Wilf Mills	Ian Carnochan	

Future Editions

The next edition will be published in the New Year.

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome. The Fabian Society exists to promote progressive ideas from within and outside of the Labour movement.

As such we are happy to publish articles in keeping with this broad ethos, but reserve the right not to include all or part of any material which falls outside of this parameter.

Links

The following links should be useful in keeping up with the debate in the Labour movement

National Fabian Society www.fabian-society.org.uk

The Labour Party www.labour.org.uk

Jon Cruddas MP for Dagenham www.joncruddas.org.uk
Barking Labour Party www.barkinglabour.org.uk/

Romford Labour Party www.romford-labour-party.org.uk/

Tribune www.tribunemagazine.co.uk

Barking and Dagenham Council Labour group www.bardaglabour.org.uk

Hope not Hate www.hopenothate.org.uk

Thames Chase Community Forest

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/recreation.nsf/LUWebDocsByKey/EnglandEssexNoForestThamesChaseCommunityForestTheThamesChaseForestCentre>

Contacts

John Biggs GLA Member for City and East London
john.biggs@london.gov.uk or join his mailing list
biggsnews@london.gov.uk

His website is www.johnbiggs.org.uk

Havering Fabian Society is affiliated to

- National Fabian Society
- Dagenham and Rainham Labour Party
- Romford Labour Party
- Upminster and Hornchurch Labour Party
- Barking Labour Party

Havering Fabian Membership

To join Havering Fabian Society, please complete the following and send to David Marshall. You can also join the Society nationally, David has more details. You do not have to be a member of the Labour Party to join Havering Fabians, but you will need to be a Labour Party member to take part in Labour Party selections and elections.



This is the twelfth edition of the newsletter. Previous editions are available, please get on touch if you want a copy; all are available via e-mail.

Havering Fabian Society

Founded in 1974, the Society promotes progressive political thought in Havering and beyond. Membership of the Society is not necessary to attend meetings, and neither is membership of the Labour Party.

However, to participate in nominations to the Local Labour Parties or in selection conferences, membership of both is required. The Society meets regularly throughout the year, apart from the summer and during election campaigns. Local Membership is currently £8 waged, £4 unwaged.

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I\ we wish to join Havering Fabians

Name

Address

.....

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.....postcode.....

E-mail.....

Phone number

Waged (£8) unwaged £4