

GREEN NEWS

NEWINGTON



Betiel Mehari



David Powell



Ekaterina Belcheva

“AFFORDABLE” HOUSING IS NOT AFFORDABLE

Working single mother of two faces second devastating eviction

Betiel Mehari is a **single mother** who **became a housing activist to try to save her own home**. She works in retail on a zero-hours contract. Betiel lived on the Loughborough Park Estate in Brixton for 11 years. Her family **lost their home** when the estate was completely demolished by housing association Guinness Partnership in a £75 million “regeneration” scheme. She was forced to leave Brixton, **losing her much valued local community, with huge disruption to her family**. (“That’s what regeneration does,” she says.) **Rehoused in a smaller flat** in Newington with no balcony, her two children aged 11 and 10 are now commuting the lengthy distance from Newington to Brixton in order to maintain their educational stability and friends.

Furthermore, Guinness **whacked up the rent** in the family’s new flat, from a social rent of £109 per week to a so-called “affordable rent” of £265 per week. Although Betiel had been a Guinness tenant for 11 years, Guinness claimed that demolishing her flat and rehousing her had created “a new tenancy”. Betiel says: “**‘Affordable’ rent is a con**. You’d assume it’s based on wages, but it’s not. It’s set at 80% of market rents, not according to any measure of actual affordability. With two kids it **requires an income of £35,000**, which is higher than the national average. This measure puts us at the mercy of the housing market – it’s **absolute madness**.”

Betiel is now **fighting against being evicted for a second time**. Although in theory her new rent is covered by Housing Benefit, payments are automatically stopped by the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) when financial circumstances change. For anyone on a zero-hours contract like Betiel, this can be often. Betiel says: “It’s happened to me twice. I was working in a cafe which closed down. The owner refused to provide me with a P45 or other paperwork, and DWP refused to rectify the situation until they received all the paperwork. I couldn’t get it within DWP’s 4-week window, after which they don’t allow any appeals. Even if you do manage to get some payments backdated, DWP often refuse to fill the gap fully.”

Because of the Tory Government’s cap on Housing Benefit payments, Betiel can’t obtain any additional income to settle the arrears from when DWP stopped payments, for which Guinness are pursuing her. If Betiel is evicted, she may **have to accept rehousing outside London**; if she refused she could be classed as “intentionally homeless”, losing her rehousing rights altogether. Betiel’s own **health has been affected** and she describes her **life as “totally ruined”**. Betiel says: “I visited the office of Neil Coyle MP seeking help. He said he’d be in touch. **I heard nothing**.”

Betiel is **passionate about maintaining social housing**. She is now **standing for the Green Party** in the local elections on 3rd May, because of its **commitment to social housing** and **providing safe, affordable homes for all**.

“Affordable” home ownership you need to earn £57,500 to afford

Housing affordability is similarly dire for those looking to get a toehold on the property ladder in our area. For supposedly affordable “part-buy-part-rent” one-bedroom flats in Elephant Park, the **required minimum household income starts at £57,500**. Labour-run Southwark Council allowed profit-making developers Lend Lease to **ignore quotas** of genuinely affordable new social homes.

Local school governor David Powell said: “The **lack of affordable housing in this area** is having an **adverse effect** even on **recruitment of teaching staff**. If a newly qualified teacher is offered a job in this area, it’s very **unlikely they can afford to live locally**. They face the prospect of a **long journey to and from work**.”



Betiel taking her story to the streets, in support of secure affordable homes for all



Unaffordable homes for sale

BETIEL, DAVID AND EKATERINA: CALLING FOR BETTER FOR OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

WALWORTH TOWN HALL BEING STEALTHILY SOLD OFF BY SOUTHWARK LABOUR

“Opportunity” pitched to investors, developers

The historic **Walworth Town Hall** building on Walworth Road, and the Newington Library next door which houses the Cuming Museum, suffered significant **damage in a fire in 2013**. In 2015 plans were drawn up for redevelopment of the buildings, but Southwark Council has now paused these plans. They were costed at around £40m, almost twice the original budget. Evidently there was **no adequate fire insurance policy** despite the fact that both these Edwardian buildings are Grade 2 listed.

Labour-run Southwark Council has published a glossy website walworthtownhall.com proclaiming an **“opportunity” for “investors, developers, businesses, organisations or other consortia”** to express interest in “play[ing] their part in reviving this historic gem”. The council proclaims willingness to consider “ancillary and complementary **commercial uses”** alongside arts and culture uses retaining “some genuine public access to... parts of the site”.

Southwark Council will retain the freehold but the leasehold may run for up to 250 years. Newington resident Ekaterina Belcheva said: “The community is concerned that with such a long lease, **a community asset is in effect being sold off** to a private enterprise.” The council has already sold off Southwark's other town halls to private developers. Bermondsey Town Hall has had 41 luxury flats carved out of it, each selling for over £1m, while the Peckham Town Hall complex now features 149 student flats. Both contain **zero affordable housing**.



David and Ekaterina: Standing up for Walworth Town Hall to remain in public use

In July 2017, the politically independent Walworth Society surveyed 265 local people about the plans for Walworth Town Hall. The majority agreed that Walworth needs these buildings to **remain in public use**, even if it takes a long time to raise the money. Respondents also want **a library and a heritage hub** included.

Newington resident David Powell said: **“Many people cannot understand why huge sums of money are being poured into the high-rise blocks now being built around the Elephant, while the Council is failing to find funds to preserve this cultural and civic hub.”**

NEWS IN BRIEF

REGISTER TO VOTE: If you are a **British, EU or Commonwealth citizen, you can vote** in the Southwark Council elections on Thursday 3rd May. **Register to vote online** at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. You just need to give your National Insurance number. (Need your number? Call 0345 600 0643.)

CLEANING AS IF HEALTH MATTERS: Eco-friendly cleaning business owner Ekaterina Belcheva recently appeared on Sky News to showcase sustainable cleaning techniques. New research suggests frequent **exposure to cleaning chemicals can harm lung function** as much as smoking 20 cigarettes a day.


PROTEST AGAINST SUPERMARKET PLASTIC: You can now join a **monthly worldwide day of protest** against wasteful plastic wrapping on your supermarket shopping. See twitter.com/notourplasticp1 for more.

CAN WE HELP?

If you have a comment or query about our area, Betiel, David and Ekaterina would love to hear from you:

walworth@southwark.greenparty.org.uk

www.southwarkgreenparty.org.uk/walworth

 Walworth Green Party
Southwark Green Party

 @Walworth_Greens / @SouthwarkGP

Want to meet?

We're happy to arrange a time.

Become a member of the Green Party:
join.greenparty.org.uk

SCHOOL BUDGET CUTS ARE HARMING OUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

A **governor of a local primary school** has spoken of his **great concern** about the **impact of budget cuts** on our **local schools**. David Powell, who is also a visiting instrumental tutor in several Southwark primary schools, said: “It seems very likely there will be a big reduction in Southwark this year, and possibly **further cuts in future years**. Despite some careful budgeting by schools aiming to protect excellence in teaching and learning, with the expected decrease in Pupil Premium it looks likely that **children from poorer families** are going to **lose much-needed support**. Many schools are already finding it **difficult to cater for the significant rise in Special Educational Needs**, particularly autism.

“The curriculum is being **reduced to a narrow number of core subjects**, and **arts and creative subjects are being squeezed out**, to the detriment of a well-rounded education. Many respected organisations have commented on **how often our children are tested**, without any significant improvement in results. This puts **a lot of unnecessary stress on pupils and teachers alike.**”



School budget cuts, curriculum cuts... but no cuts to stressful tests

GREENS: PRINCIPLED LOCAL ACTIVISTS, WORKING FOR WALWORTH