

Greens, Disabled People Against Cuts and bereaved mother call for inquiry into deaths of benefit claimants



10 February 2017

The Green Party, Disabled People Against Cuts and a mother whose son died after his benefits were cut have called on the Government to launch an independent inquiry into the deaths of benefit claimants.

An letter [1] to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Damian Green MP, calls on the Department for Work and Pensions to launch an independent inquiry into the methods used to assess benefit claimants and their entitlements, to determine “whether these procedures are fair and proper or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of claimants”.

The Green Party has also compiled a dossier listing 50 people who died while claiming benefits. The dossier includes the death of Mark Wood, whose mother Jill Gant co-signed the letter to Damian Green.

Wood starved to death in 2013, aged 44. A doctor had said Wood, who had Asperger’s syndrome, obsessive compulsive disorder and mental health problems, was completely unfit to work. Yet despite this Wood was found fit for work and his benefits were cut, forcing him to survive on about £40 per week. Four months later he was found dead, weighing just 35kg. [2]

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party, said:

“It is unacceptable that in the fifth richest country in the world people are starving to death, like Mark Wood, or taking their own lives, as Michael O’Sullivan did, because their benefits have been cut. The social security system should be an ally, not an enemy of those who need help.

“Britain is a caring nation. We should be proud to look after each other and take every measure possible to ensure people receive the support they need – starting with an independent inquiry into the deaths of benefit claimants.”

Mags Lewis, disabled spokesperson for the Green Party, said:

“We urgently need an independent inquiry into the deaths of people receiving benefits to find out if the methods used by the Department of Work and Pensions to assess claimants are fair or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of some of claimants.

“Until this has taken place it is impossible to feel confident that lessons have been learned from the tragic loss of those who have already died while claiming benefits – or that others will be kept safe in the future.”

Linda Burnip, co-founder of Disabled People Against Cuts, said:

" As the UK Government has been found guilty by the UN of committing grave and systematic violations of disabled people's human rights we feel a public inquiry into deaths which have been linked to the discredited Work Capability Assessment regime must urgently be initiated by the government and Department for Work and Pensions."

Jill Gant, mother of Mark Wood, who starved to death four months after his benefits were cut off in 2013, said:

"I believe an enquiry is absolutely essential because the Work Capability Assessment is not fit for purpose for the most vulnerable, particularly those with mental health problems, like my son Mark who died of starvation aged 44 because his benefits were stopped."

Notes:

1.

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The Biscuit Factory
Room 202, A Block
100 Clements Road
London
SE16 4DG

The Rt Honourable Damian Green MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to ask you to launch an independent inquiry into the deaths of people receiving benefits. Such an inquiry should be tasked with examining the methods used to assess claimants and their entitlements. It should determine whether these procedures are fair and proper or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of some of claimants – who have the highest support needs which should be met by society.

As the evidence continues to mount that this is the case, The Green Party has compiled a dossier highlighting the stories of fifty individuals who died since 2008, and where there is good reason to believe their treatment at the hands of your department has been a factor in their deaths.

Treatment such as the suspension of benefits to David Clapson who went on to die just three weeks later from diabetic ketoacidosis, after the fridge used to store his insulin stopped working when he couldn't afford to top up his electricity card. Many of these fifty examples cases coroners, in their verdicts, have expressed grave concern about the methods employed by your

department.

We want to ensure that all pertinent questions have been asked, and that any relevant lessons have been learned. At present it is impossible to feel confident this is the case.

The more time passes without an inquiry, the longer concerns will remain and questions will hang over the procedures used by your department to handle benefits. We urge you to use your power to end that uncertainty.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party

Mags Lewis, disability spokesperson for the Green Party

Linda Burnip, co-founder of Disabled People Against Cuts

Jill Gant, mother of Mark Wood, who starved to death four months after his benefits were cut off in 2013.

2.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/mark-wood-sweet-and-gentle-44-year-old-man-with-mental-health-problems-starved-to-death-after-9161749.html>

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Brexit bill: Green MEPs blast MPs for failing to stand up for Parliamentary democracy



9 February 2017

*** Molly Scott Cato MEP: "While the government is moving us towards the hard Brexit cliff edge, it is Labour that seems willing to push us off."**

*** Keith Taylor MEP: "As Greens, we believe the British people should have the final say on the Brexit deal, once it is clear what the outcome of the negotiations are."**

*** Jean Lambert MEP: “How bizarre that, as an MEP, I am guaranteed a right to vote on this but my MP has to plead for the privilege.”**

UK Green MEPs, Molly Scott Cato, Jean Lambert, and Keith Taylor have issued a stinging condemnation of British MPs after Theresa May’s Brexit bill denying Parliament any real say in the process [sailed through the Commons](#).

The Prime Minister rejected calls for MPs to have a meaningful role in shaping the proposed divorce deal. The government, instead, confirmed that the parliamentarians elected to represent the British and Northern Irish people will only be offered a ‘take it or leave it’ vote on the final deal.

UK Green MEPs, who will get an opportunity to play a part in the EU’s negotiating process and cast a significant vote on the final terms of the deal, hit out at the Government for undermining the sovereignty of the UK Parliament.

Molly Scott Cato MEP, the Green Party’s Brexit spokesperson and MEP for the South West, said:

“I am delighted that 122 MPs voted against the Brexit bill. With Labour, Lib Dem, SNP, and Plaid Cymru MPs joining Green MP Caroline Lucas to reject the Bill unamended, we have seen a progressive alliance against the government’s plans for an extreme Brexit.

However, while the government is moving us towards the hard Brexit cliff edge, it is Labour that seems willing to push us off. The Party has shown itself hopelessly divided and the failure to oppose the government on this the most critical of issues has played straight into the hands of the Tory Right.

Greens have been clear throughout: we cannot support triggering a process that will see the UK leave the single market and customs union and threatens to turn us into Europe’s biggest tax haven. We need clear guarantees on worker and consumer rights and assurances there will be no weakening of environmental protections.”

Jean Lambert, the Green MEP for London, said:

“It’s outrageous that MPs appear grateful to be offered a vote on the final deal, rather than demanding this as a Parliamentary right. How bizarre that, as an MEP, I am guaranteed a right to vote on this but my MP has to plead for the privilege. And if my elected representative in UK Parliament has to plead, what say will the public get? The sidelining of Parliament and the British people is unacceptable.

The UK Parliament has chosen to set out little clear guidance for the Government on content or process: on what basis will MPs judge the final deal?”

Keith Taylor, the Green MEP for the South East and a plaintiff in so-called ‘[Dublin Case](#)’, said:

“Theresa May has justified her riding roughshod over Parliamentary democracy by claiming the British people have united to back Brexit. They haven’t. Far from it. The mandate for an extreme Brexit is non-existent. According to the [latest polls](#), just 39% of the British public support the Prime Minister’s vision of an extreme Brexit. Meanwhile, 48% of people want Britain to either remain a member of the EU or, at least, maintain a close relationship with our European neighbours.

Yet the Government has confirmed that it will only offer MPs a Hobson’s choice: the UK either leaves the single market and negotiates a new deal with the EU or ends up with no deal at all, in which case the Government promises to make the country a tax haven outside Europe.

I know we can do better than this. Which is why I am fighting in the courts for the British people to be given the choice they are being denied. The EU referendum should have been the start of a democratic process, not the end of one. As Greens, we believe the British people should have the final say on the Brexit deal, once it is clear what the outcome of the negotiations are.”

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[Green Party: Government decision to take only 350 child refugees is an ‘absolute disgrace’](#)



8 February 2017

The Green Party has responded to the Government’s announcement it will take only 350 lone child refugees instead of a proposed 3000 [1].

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said:

“This announcement, which the Tories have tried to sneak out just before recess, is an absolute disgrace. This is nowhere near the 3000 originally proposed by Lord Dubs and it equates to less than one per local authority in the UK. Any claim by the Prime Minister to be a compassionate Conservative is utterly undermined by the dereliction of duty to some of the most vulnerable people in the world. The Government should have been doing far more to support local authorities. I have visited Calais and seen firsthand the horrifying daily risks the children there faced and how desperate for safety

they were. This is a national scandal, which disgraces us all. The Government should hang its head in shame.”

Notes:

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/08/dubs-scheme-lone-child-refugees-uk-closed-down>

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Green Party: Better Care Fund is the latest on a long list of the Government's NHS failures



8 February 2017

The Green Party has responded to a report showing Government plans to join up the social care and health sectors to save money and work for hospitals are failing [1].

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said:

“The Government appears to be in total denial about its consistent and repeated failures around our NHS, and what is at their heart. So far the Better Care Fund looks to have been a waste of time, money and effort. It simply hasn't achieved its stated goals of savings and reducing emergency admissions, with emergency visits soaring and hospital workloads bigger than ever.

“While we welcome a joined up approach between social and health care this project simply isn't delivering and it won't as long as cash flow worries mount. The Government should urgently review the specific problems around the fund. But it must also face up to the wider issue of chronic under investment in health and social care.

“This is just the latest on a growing list of failures within the NHS, contributing to a growing crisis. The Government must commit to easing the pressure on both healthcare professionals and patients who are all suffering under the current mismanagement of what should be, and could be a flagship health service.”

Notes:

1. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-38894593>

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MEP warns of 'toxic' legacy for UK if government signs EU-Canada trade deal



7 February 2017

As MEPs prepare to vote on whether or not to ratify a controversial trade deal next week, Molly Scott Cato, Green MEP for the South West, has warned the UK could find itself in the 'worst of all possible worlds' if the UK sign up to the deal.

The Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) [1] between Canada and the EU has always been opposed by Greens as it seeks to give more power to corporations while putting public services and workers' and consumer rights at risk and threaten environmental regulations.

But now Dr Scott Cato says that a new House of Commons briefing [2] confirms that when the UK leaves the EU, it could be forced to renegotiate its trade agreements with Canada yet still be bound by the treaty for 20 years. She said:

"One of the key reasons Greens have opposed CETA is because of the power this treaty gives to corporations to sue governments over legislation that threatens their profits. If CETA is ratified before the UK exits the EU, we will need to renegotiate our trade agreements with Canada but still be bound by the investor protection provision aspect of this treaty for 20 years. This would mean foreign investors would still have the right to sue the UK government if they feel their businesses have been impacted by new laws or regulations.

"Signing up to CETA is the worst of all possible worlds for the UK. It will take us back to square one on trade negotiations with Canada but trap us in a most toxic element of this treaty. With Brexit looming it is even more critical that all British MEPs vote this dodgy deal down next week in the European Parliament."

[1]

<http://ttip2017.eu/blog/id-12-reasons-the-greenefa-group-are-opposed-to-ceta.html>

[2] <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7492>

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