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# Dalston Revisited - Report on the protest at Gillett 'square' today

ByBen

This is a brief report about the anti-gentrification (sorry, 'cultural regeneration') protest in Dalston today. I left out some of the most telling and blackly comic bits (eg the street poet's unfortunate declarations, such as: 'today, we're re-writing history'), but maybe other people will give their accounts...

The protest in Gillett Square went well with lots of people - notably the stewards for the launch of the Square and members of the various NGOs involved in inaugurating the cultural offensive against Dalston! - coming up to protestors with friendly words and assurances that, 'at other levels', although this particular project was compromised, they were doing lots of good work.

I won't name names but a nice lady from a major urban landscaping group involved in the Gillett square project insisted that one consider the good work such groups are doing all over the area at the aforementioned 'other levels' - presumably sub-nuclear stuff involving unpaid youth labour and street furniture. When asked what it means that the ratio of big visible massive catalysts of gentrification to supposedly benign micro-interventions is vastly skewed in favour of the catalysis of gentrification and the transfer of wealth from poor to rich, she demured.

Clearly you need a powerful faculty for self-deception to think that the particular can forever be asked to blot out the general - such is the faith of the well meaning 'community regenerators' who were a sizeable part of the crowd at this event. Wonks and stooges abounded, and behind the multicultural windowdressing and schooldchildren in carnival get up, it was clear that the show was far from capturing the hearts of local people. The turn out was pretty feeble, even allowing for the curious timing (mid afternoon on a friday - no danger of most working class Hackney people turning out - friendly or otherwise). Everyone who asked me about why we were protesting seemed sympathetic and apparently well aware of what is really going on in the area - as mentioned, this included those stewarding the event! (Watch out Pipe and Livingston, one day your agency-hired praetorian guard may turn against you). No one disagreed that Livingstone and Jules Pipe (Hackney's much abhorred mayor) had a colossal nerve turning up to crow in the midst of the mega-privatisation and gentrification campaign they lead.

Predictably, Livingston and Pipe were less diffident than the (as ever, preemptively defensive and self-critical) NGO altruists. Smarm-impregnated, the two politicians tried with practised brazenness to overlook the very loud wall of angry and shouting protestors waving large banners against 'regenicide' and 'social cleansing' etc as they delivered their orations. However, Ken was forced to show his true colours. A little way into his self-congratulatory speech (which included the threat to repeat this project all over London - 'Not if we break your legs', retorted one astute heckler) he mentioned that it was a shame that some people were 'ungrateful' for the LDA and NGO's largesse. Ungrateful!? It was like a trip back into the 1880s - once again the undeserving had sadly disappointed their masters. The 'Let them eat culture' banners took on an even more pointed air.

All in all, it was great to see so many people turn out to protest and so many people taking - and reading! - flyers and sharing experiences. It would be great if every such regen spectacle could encounter the same, and indeed growing, resistance. It would be even greater if the bankrupt populists fronting the proceedings gave some sign of registering how profoundly unpopular their policies are. And it is also quite interesting to see how scared of even such mild public opposition to the

regen-gentrification process are the powers that be - from the police interviewing protestors in advance about their intentions up to the winks heading up the 'community regen' process who barraged the protestors with pleas that they call off the protest in the preceding days.

Below is the text of the flyer that was handed out during the 'festivities'; feel free to recirculate - as a list of Hackney's suffering at the hands of the council, LDA and central govt. it will probably stay all too current.

Ben

**Hackney Council's anti-social behaviour is pushing out the poor: council flats sold off and community facilities shut down to make way for more yuppie flats and bars.**

Livingstone and Pipe are showing breathtaking arrogance in coming here and telling us to be grateful for a new square on a site that was already public space (the Colin Roach Centre, a vital local resource, stood on Gillett Street). Hackney people know very well that the council and LDA are presiding over a wholesale onslaught on the area:

- Rocketing rents and rates threaten residents and local businesses with eviction: this will only get worse with the Olympics and the tube.
- Epidemic homelessness in a borough full of bricked-up flats. The council leaves housing to rot in an attempt to blackmail tenants to accept stock transfer; no chance of council housing for the next generation. New Labour's 'rent convergence' policy means high market rents for social or so-called 'affordable' housing.
- Corrupt council sell-off of Broadway Market and Dalston Lane to offshore developers. Under the new owners Dalston Lane shops suffer 'mysterious' fires in preparation for the LDA Olympic transport interchange, while the Four Aces/Dalston Theatre faces demolition after eviction of a community social centre. (Along with the All Nations Club the Four Aces is another black cultural venue destroyed to make way for the new Hackney).
- State schools are shut down while organisations like Swiss Bank UBS build City Academies; swimming pools and leisure centres stay shut or re-open at inflated prices; doctor's surgeries, playing fields, nurseries sold off and local services cut.
- Regeneration agencies promise new buildings and 'arts' for the community but 'culture-led regeneration' leads to rising local property prices, pushing out local people to make way for yuppies. This has already happened in Stoke Newington, Hoxton, Broadway Market and Hackney Central – WATCH OUT DALSTON!

Livingstone and Pipe expect us to put up with this quietly or even play along with them. But many examples of local resistance show that we won't: the ongoing campaign in Broadway Market; the occupation of the Four Aces/Dalston Theatre; repeated votes against council housing stock transfer (until the council imposed the ALMO unilaterally – with 'consultation' of course).

**We need our homes and livelihoods not council-sponsored 'creativity'.**

**We'll have something to celebrate when we've forced Jules Pipe to give back what was taken away and stop the class cleansing of Hackney.**