

thesocialistpostbag

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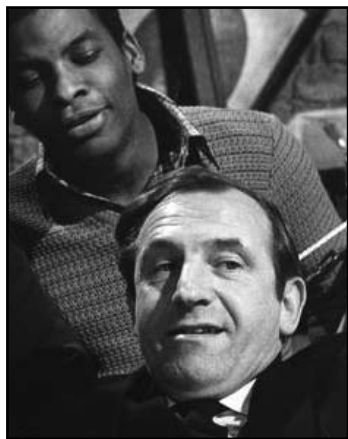
Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbag, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, or phone 020 8988 8771, email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk. We reserve the right to shorten letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Slum landlords

BBC'S Panorama programme on "slum landlords" focused on private landlords who specialise in renting properties to people on housing benefit in towns with high unemployment and social deprivation.

You saw tenants living in properties with no heating, no hot water, broken windows, blocked drains, rising damp, disintegrating paint-work and unsafe electric wiring. An estimated £3.5 billion in housing benefit is paid to "neglectful landlords" every year. The Tory housing minister did not dispute this figure when interviewed.

Many people become private tenants after losing their jobs and their homes to the economic crisis. Many are directed to the private sector by the Con-Dem government which is slashing the social housing budget after almost no new council houses have been built for the last 20 years. Housing benefit cuts will mean many people living in these hellholes won't be able to pay their rents and could easily end up homeless.



Rising Damp landlord Rigby.

A Centre for Housing Policy spokeswoman said that the government "is in danger of taking Britain back to the Victorian era" when the poor received no state help and were forced to survive on hand-outs from private benefactors.

In David Cameron's "big society", where slum-dwelling is apparently acceptable, Britain's less well-off cities are beginning to resemble Dickensian London. How long before our "undeserving poor" are carted off to workhouses? We need a mass organised fightback against these inhumane cuts.

Dave Younger, Leeds

Demo this year!

A national TUC demonstration against the cuts next March, as proposed by the TUC, is far too late! Here in Coventry if the Labour council get their way over 1,000 jobs will already have gone!

I was really heartened to hear about the PCS union's work in taking the initiative and pledging to organise a demo this year. Unison and PCS have a joint statement explaining that they will work together against the cuts.

Now it is critical that every Unison activist puts pressure on the Unison leadership at local, regional and national level to turn these words into action and support the work of the PCS in getting things moving.

Unison steward, Coventry

21st century slave

The Millennium Trilogy by Stieg Larson, which has been reviewed in The Socialist, are fascinating books. The girl of The Girl who Kicked the Hornet's Nest is Lisbeth Salander, a victim of horrifying childhood abuse by a respectable psychiatrist. She develops skills as a computer hacker to punish men who torture women.

The book touches on the 21st century slave trade - in which girls from the former USSR are duped into working as prostitutes in Sweden and subjected to rape and torture often by respected members of society, is one of the less-documented stories of the collapse of communism loudly trumpeted by apologists of capitalism as "the end of history."

Derek McMillan, Sussex

Two faces

I see Chuka Ummuna, the Labour MP, was due to speak at an anti-cuts event recently. Is this the same Chuka Ummuna who was on the BBC2 programme Daily Politics recently saying "we have accepted globalised capitalism"?

It can't be the same bloke as that would be like saying two contradictory things to different audiences wouldn't it?

Pete, Worcester

Pay at the top

The cry of the Con-Dem coalition is 'we're all in this together'. Well not if the recent rise in board-room pay is anything to go by.

According to recent research, pay at the 'top' has shot up by an incredible 55% in the past year. And the average FTSE chief executive now earns almost 200 times the average wage.

When workers are losing their jobs and cuts are hitting vital public services, this is obscene. It's time to step up the resistance to such greed and demand that such high incomes are taxed heavily, in order to fund public services, and reduce inequality.

Graeme Kemp, Shropshire

Fight the fees

The current right-wing New Labour National Union of Students (NUS) leadership could be presiding over the single greatest increase in tuition fees from the current level of over £3,000 a year, to the uncapped draconian proposals in the Browne Review. The NUS has for a long time not supported free education. Instead, in the last years, the NUS 'campaigns' for a graduate tax, where students would end up paying even more for their education than they currently do.

The NUS leadership argued that a moderate policy like the graduate tax would get them a place on the negotiating table; it didn't. Now is the time to push the NUS leadership to adopt the only possible strategy. No to any increases in tuition fees, no to all education cuts; as an important step towards free publicly funded education for all. Build a mass campaign.

Ian Pattison,
Leeds Socialist Students

Don't destroy our sickness benefits

When the Con-Dem government announced its cuts, Steve Spreadborough of Coventry appeared on the BBC News, speaking emotionally of his fears of losing his home and more. Here Steve talks to The Socialist.

I AM A married man with four children. I'll say this the way the Conservatives would: 'Following an accident at work I've been sitting at home, scrounging off the system, letting my children run riot and letting taxpayers bring us up.'

Right, that's the lies out of the way. I now have health problems, but I have not sat on my backside and let my illness dictate to me, as that would send the wrong message to my children.

My eldest daughter works in a home with special needs adults and is on call 24 hours a day. My eldest son has autism and dyspraxia, but is in full time college. The youngest son left school four years ago and has not had a job, though not through lack of trying. But he works in the community doing gardens for the elderly. My youngest daughter has devoted her life to becoming a vet.

I would like to say sorry to all the politicians for taking 4,000 milli-

During the Labour government a coffin was being built for public services. The Tory-Liberal cuts are an attempt to finish that coffin.



Millionaire welfare 'reform' minister Iain Duncan Smith.

grams of painkillers every day, aspirin to keep my heart going, and eight tablets for diabetes. I'd also like to say sorry for the stroke I had four years ago, the three weeks I was in hospital learning to walk and talk again, and the burden I was on the NHS.

During the Labour government a coffin was being built for public services. The Tory-Liberal cuts are an attempt to finish that coffin. You're OK if you're rich but if you're low paid and in the public sector you are about to lose everything unless you go to where the work is. And that means getting on your bike and going to live in India or China because that is where our factories have gone.

It's not easy being on benefits. I've survived on one meal a day for many years. I have served on 30 local and council committees to help people worse off than me. I don't believe in getting something for nothing, so I

try to put back what I can.

A big nail in the coffin of our living standards will come in January with the VAT rise.

Today, I live in social housing in Coventry. In a couple of years, because of benefit cuts and rent rises, I could be living on a street or in a field.

So I say to working people when you are facing a decision about whether to fight back against the government onslaught, go home and look at all you have got and think about what you will lose if you don't fight for it.

To trade unions, I say get together and act as one. Don't be blackmailed because politicians are like wolves and they will try to divide and conquer. Probably not one Labour, not one Tory, not one Lib Dem MP will lose their jobs and the bankers will still get their bonuses at the cost of the public sector. We have no option but to fight back.

'Standing together' with Labour?

A CAMBRIDGE Labour Student, George Owens, recently told The Guardian that Ed Miliband should have been invited to address a recent anti-cuts rally because "if we don't stand together as a Labour and trade union movement, we will fall apart".

As a mature student and active trade unionist, I'm happy to stand together with George, Ed, or any Labour party member to oppose all cuts in jobs and services. But who's failing to stand together with whom?

Free market policies implemented by New Labour ministers mean I've only been able to study for a degree by incurring a five-digit debt.

The Browne Review, following an agenda dictated by Labour, severely dents my chances of postgraduate study and stops my children even having my limited opportunities for higher education, let alone Miliband's access to a (free) Oxbridge degree.

I've now been made redundant from my part-time welfare rights adviser job by New Labour's 'contract' driven scheme for funding legal aid. This threatens income I desperately need to study but it's a far worse blow to my many clients, threatened with losing their subsistence income by New Labour's benefit 'reforms'.

Con-Dem cuts differ from new Labour's policies only in extent, have no support amongst most people, and can be defeated by a mass movement of trade unionists, service users and students.

But while Miliband and New Labour believe that 'free enterprise' and the 'market' are more important than the jobs and services of ordinary people, and while Labour councils prefer to implement cuts rather than defy the government, they will find it difficult to 'stand together' with working people in that fight.

Paul Moorhouse, University of West of England Socialist Students

"Cracking down" on Vodafone!

LIB DEM minister Danny Alexander told his party conference: "Chancellor George Osborne and I have agreed a package of new measures to crack down on tax avoidance and evasion. We will be ruthless with those often wealthy people and businesses who think they can treat paying tax as an optional extra."

So now's the time for action. First in the sights is Vodafone, who reportedly owe £6 billion in tax. God help Vodafone facing this 'ruthless' approach! OK George and Danny, what are you going to do? Well how about cancelling almost the entire outstanding tax bill!

Sorry, did I hear that right? Yes I did and so did a senior figure in Revenues and Customs who said this was "an unbelievable cave-in."

What else are you going to do George? Go on a taxpayer funded trip to India and promote Vodafone (who also owe the Indian government tax)!

OK, you've dropped most of the tax Vodafone owe the British people while overseeing the worst cuts since the 1920s and you've spent a state sponsored visit to India promoting Vodafone.

But at least with this 'ruthless' approach Vodafone won't have any influence over government policy! Well that is if you don't consider Andy Halford, Vodafone's finance director, being appointed to the government's Advisory Board on Business Tax Rates. Actions speak louder than words, so are we still all in this together?

Mike Aistrop, Cumbria