

## thesocialistpostbag

**Do you have something to say?**

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.

**Tragic consequences of cutbacks**

The Tories and Lib Dems are spelling out their massive cuts in public sector workers' jobs and their evil attack on sick and unemployed people's benefits. The effect of these attacks came home to me tragically in what happened to my brother John. John had been unemployed for 20 years and in that time, he went on thousands of courses, did everything the Jobcentre put him through and he still could not get a full-paid job. The threat to his council flat and benefits was the final straw.

I saw him on 20 October and he seemed fine. On 27 October I got a visit from the police to say that my brother had taken his own life - he had hung himself. He was the best brother you could have, he would do anything for you. When the Tories and Lib Dems say that people on benefits are scroungers, it's an insult to his memory.

Stoke city council have just announced 7.1% spending cuts each year with many more people losing their jobs. How many other people will take the same way out as my brother did? I have posted a book of condolence on my facebook page for people to sign in memory of John.

**Alan Holdway, Stoke**

**Phil Woolas - good riddance**

I think it is wonderful that the political life of this scurrilous careerist Phil Woolas has met an appropriate end, with him being stripped of his Commons seat. Even his New Labour mates disowned him completely! He took the money and did nothing for the constituency.

I recall one incident. I have an autistic son and my wife was involved in discussions with him about dyspraxic people being imprisoned (an anomalously high percentage of Britain's prison population suffers some kind of mental disability).

He promised to ask questions in parliament on that matter and others relating to mental disability but never did.

He did mention (correctly) the issue about first cousin marriages and disability within the Pakistani community, which however seems to correlate with his playing of the race card in a general election.

Woolas showed disgraceful behaviour for a Labour MP - I say good riddance to bad rubbish!

**Andy Martin, Oldham**

**'Open for business'**

Britain is the easiest place in the G8 and the European Union for entrepreneurs to do business, says the World Bank. Britain is the world's fourth easiest place to do business, after Singapore, Hong Kong and New Zealand. Even the US was only fifth.

Britain gets full marks for recent changes in bankruptcy rules, which make sure 'business assets could be reallocated quickly and not get stuck in court'. This is code for: "if your business goes bump, pay creditors a few pence in the pound, don't worry about redundancy pay and pensions for workers losing their jobs, and become a director of a new business in next to no time."

When Pilkington's Tiles of Salford went into administration in July, workers found a shortfall in pensions and NI payments from the employer. They hadn't even paid all the union dues across to Unite but gave themselves an interest-free loan from the union! Pilkingtons are still working, under administrators KPMG, with a vastly slimmed down workforce, 'fulfilling remaining orders'.

George Osborne says Britain is 'open for business'. Only the workers get the door slammed shut in their faces.

**Paul Gerrard, Salford Socialist Party**

**Age discrimination**

I read your paper, 5 November. I agree with a lot of what you have written about the cuts and it is happening everywhere. This government and the last and our councils are allowed to do as they like.

In July I was given six months' notice to finish my job in January 2011, so were a few of my work friends. Everyone on the council was offered voluntary severance pay.

But because I was 65 (and my friend's older) we cannot have it because of our age. I would say this is age discrimination.

The council says this is the law. This is the thanks you get 27 years later for working for Cardiff city council.

**Mrs C Hodd, Cardiff**

**Civil disobedience killed poll tax**

The Financial Times published Socialist Party member Kevin Parslow's letter (below) after columnist Brian Groom repeated TUC chief Brendan Barber's claim that the poll tax was defeated by 'irate constituents filling MPs' postbags in the shire towns'.

Brian Groom (Notebook, October 26) outlined the strong history of protest in Britain. Among the events listed he mentions the riot in Trafalgar Square against the poll tax in 1990.

This came at the end of a demonstration of 200,000 against the tax (and there were 50,000 people on a march in Glasgow the same day). The demonstrations were part of the mass campaign of civil disobedience against the tax.

However, Mr Groom echoes the wrong conclusions of Brendan Barber in attributing the demise of the poll tax to a mass letter-writing campaign.

Is he not aware of the demonstrations up and down the country, including towns such as Stroud and Maidenhead, little known to mass protests, against the setting of the tax?

Or the mass campaign of non-payment involving 18 million people at its height, organised by the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, led by the Militant Tendency (now the Socialist Party)?

Or the clogging up of the courts because of the high level of non-payment of the tax, the resistance to bailiffs and sheriffs (in Scotland), and even those prepared to go to jail for non-payment, including the late MP Terry Fields?

It was this mass campaign that defeated the poll tax, and Mr Barber and other trade union leaders must draw the conclusion that a campaign of similar scale and determination is needed to defeat the massive attacks on jobs and services from this government.

**Kevin Parslow**

# NHS - workers looking for a fighting lead



Health service workers join a north London campaign to save a hospital.

photo Paul Mattsson

A trade union activist in the NHS wrote the letter below to Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe on the response to Con-Dem cuts within the NHS.

**A**FTER A meeting with my NHS trust management, who are pushing through redundancies, I had a surreal discussion with union full-time officials from Unison, Unite and the BMA.

We discussed if and when the mass of workers in the trust would take action in defence of their jobs. We talked about events in France and in what circumstances workers here would take similar action. The consensus was that it would come - the BMA full-timer even suggested some doctors and consultants would join in.

What struck me is the difference between now and the Thatcher era of the 1980s. Then there was a certain acceptance of Thatcher's position - a homogeneity of opinion amongst what, for want of any other way of describing it, is the professional and managerial class. Today they are not signed up to the cuts but fear for themselves and their future.

They find themselves pushing cuts and redundancies but do so with no enthusiasm, unlike 20 or so years ago when a layer of senior management pushed cuts with enthusiasm and some determination. Clearly now, given the lack of determination of those responsible for these cuts and redundancies, the ability for mass movements to defeat them is inherent.

One union full-timer described

his conversation with a national HR (human resources) director in the NHS. This senior manager said he feared for industrial relations in the NHS.

He expected the government to attack the NHS redundancy scheme, forcing a levelling to statutory minimum as well as pushing through changes in the NHS pension scheme.

He could not see the mass of workers accepting this. He said that even British workers would respond like the French and that he and many others would have sympathy for the workers' position.

The full-timer felt this was a genuine view expressed in a candid moment. I think this is of real significance for battles to come.

In my Trust, Unison had about 300 members out of 1,000 staff (there are other unions here). But we recruited 200 in the last two weeks. We had

two stewards. Two members who came to a recent lobby agreed to become stewards - doubling our representational base. Ten more people have come forward wanting to become union stewards. That's unprecedented in recent years.

We told senior managers this - they were delighted and willing to release them all to get them trained in the next few weeks. They said they were really pleased we were improving our organisation on the ground. The world really is a strange place at the moment!

Finally, members who came to the TUC lobby of the government before the spending review were all disappointed with the trade union speakers - except for Woodley who they said had some fire in his belly. Clearly ordinary members who have not yet played any active part in the union are looking for militant leadership.

**Peter Taaffe replied:**

**M**ANY THANKS for your letter. It is significant that workers are joining the unions because of the prevailing and growing sense of insecurity because of the jobs massacre in the offing.

Equally important is your point about the intermediate layers. I also emphasise this in the article I wrote for The Socialist on the cuts (see [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk)). As with France, decisive action by the working class and their organisations can attract these intermediate layers.

But the decisive question is, of course, how the unions react and that is connected to the role of the

leadership. Even the organically sceptical Unison leadership can be pushed by events but this will take mighty pressure from below.

We were very successful in the demonstrations on 23 October, but Unison participation, at least officially from branches, was striking. The NSSN has played a key role, under our leadership, in pushing the more militant trade unions into action.

Such is the mood from below that this can force the unions - if not the TUC then the more militant left-led unions - into calling a demonstration before Christmas which could receive widespread support from the union movement as a whole.

## Review: Call Mr Robeson

KATE JONES reviews Call Mr Robeson: A Life, with Songs, a one-man show currently on tour. It is coming to Coventry (Belgrade Theatre) on 27 November and Lincoln (University) on 11 December. For further details see <http://www.callmrobeson.com>

**T**AYO ALUKO'S one-man performance of his own production, Call Mr Robeson, is a theatre experience with left-wing politics. He manages to convey the

life and music of this great African-American, Paul Robeson, who was a star of stage and screen. But he was also a committed socialist, who put his political principles before his career. As a result he is less known today than he should be, especially in the USA.

Tayo gives a good rendering of the power of Robeson's singing in songs from spirituals to socialist songs like Joe Hill. The show's strength, though, is his first-person account of Robeson's life, from law student and football player, to star of stage musicals like Showboat, the first black actor to play Othello on a major stage, firm friend and supporter of the Welsh miners in the 1930s, victim of the House Un-American

Activities Committee, active supporter of trade union and black civil rights in the USA, and supporter of the USSR.

Robeson was seduced by Stalinism, to the extent of refusing to support American Trotskyists persecuted by the US government (although this is not touched upon in this performance) but this should not put socialists off attending this remarkable show.

Nigerian born Tayo Aluko lives in Liverpool and recently gave up his work as an architect to tour with his Robeson show.

The performance ended with Tayo taking questions and discussion - a welcome addition to such a political performance.