

thesocialistpostbag

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Fees rise - not 'affordable' for the nation

photo Senan

Research by the Higher Education Policy Institute has found that raising the cap on tuition fees to £9,000 a year is just as likely to cost more money as to save cash. This flies in the face of the arguments used to justify the increase.

We were told that 'we all have to make sacrifices' because 'there is no money left'. But if future graduate earnings don't reach the government's predictions, the new system will be more expensive than the last and judging by the current rates of graduate unemployment, this is increasingly likely. Of course, the coalition has no plans to change the proposal, insisting that it is 'affordable for the nation'. So, we can afford to spend extra money charging students more, which we have to do because we couldn't afford to spend less charging less - perhaps the government will forgive us for being a little 'confused'.

It is becoming more and more ridiculous to claim that these cuts are about practicalities rather than an ideological opposition to the universal right to education.

Sarah Wrack

Charity can't replace public spending

I've heard it all now with the Con-Dems' proposal (welcomed by Labour!) to promote charity giving. Ideas include being pestered to donate every time we use a credit card or use an ATM machine.

Other proposals include being prompted to donate when applying for a passport or driving licence. And big lottery winners could get a letter from a government minister if they make a charity donation. Wow.

So not only are thousands of working people losing their jobs every month (including charity workers), or having their wages, benefits and pensions reduced and seeing taxes rise, we now have to put up with Francis 'not short of a bob or two' Maude lecturing us on how good it feels to give to charity!

What planet do these people live on? Do they think we are stupid and can't see that the Con-Dems want private charity to fill the chasm created by their policies of 'rolling back the state' and slashing public spending?

Pull the other one Francis, it's got bells on it!

Rob Bishop,
Cheltenham**Scabbing farce**

Birmingham City Council had been mismanaging its finances for years. Even before the banking crisis and the Con-Dems' emergency budget there was a huge black hole in their finances that (according to them) necessitated cuts in spending of £75 million.

This, the government's budget and attempting to make council workers pay for equalisation of pay under the Single Status agreement have provoked a battle with refuse workers. They are currently working to rule in protest at cuts of up to £4,000 a year in their wages (see report page 4) so the council hired 200 scabs... only to find most of them can't drive dustcarts. The result is only a quarter of the normal number of crews are collecting rubbish.

Not only do Birmingham's Con-Dem council mismanage their finances, they can't even organise scabbing!

Clive Walder,
Birmingham Socialist Party**Knights in class war armour**

In the New Year's honours list, the Con-Dem coalition knighted some of Britain's most ruthless business characters, such as 'Sir' Martin Broughton, chair of British Airways, who has been conducting a vicious war against his own cabin crew employees.

Then there's Roger Carr, who was chair of Cadbury before the chocolate company was swallowed whole by Kraft. But Carr himself started out as part of a corporate raiding team who organised mergers and acquisitions at a huge profit for shareholders - and executives like Sir Roger.

Carr is also chairman of Centrica, which owns British Gas and makes big profits from this privatised energy concern. In 2008 they threatened to raise gas prices by 70% - recession has kept prices down until now, otherwise Carr's elevation would have been far more controversial.

Carr also manages to squeeze in an adviser's job to US private equity firm KKR with stakes in Boots the chemist that recently moved its HQ to tax haven Switzerland.

Later this year Carr becomes president of the bosses' organisation CBI. His rise and that of Broughton show what kind of tough anti-union employer big business and the Tory government want on their side. Workers need representatives as determined as them to fight on our side.

Keith White

Fighting attacks on NHS

Hundreds of ancillary staff at Medway hospital in Gillingham, Kent, are threatened with privatisation of their jobs some time this year. Management have spent thousands and thousands on so-called management consultants, while at the same time attacking the terms and conditions of staff in the hospital.

The trade unions' response has been weak but union members want to fight back with action, including strike action.

Our local anti-cuts campaign group is planning a demo at the end of January. All anti-cuts groups should link up to fight the cuts across the board but also to support the fight against privatisation in the NHS.

Andrew Travers,
trade union activist

Review

Fela! the musical



WHEN NIGERIAN musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti died in 1997, over one million people attended his funeral in Lagos. His Afrobeat music and opposition to corrupt military dictatorships inspired millions across Africa and beyond.

Jon Dale

Born in 1938, his mother was a teacher, political activist and women's rights campaigner who had played an important role in the struggle for independence from British colonial rule. His father was a Protestant minister.

From 1958 to 1963 Fela studied music in London, returning to Nigeria as a jazz trumpeter and later saxophonist and pianist. He took his band to the USA in 1969 - the time of the civil rights movement and the Black Panthers.

Activists introduced him to the ideas of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver and others. But he recognised that 'Black Power' was not the simple answer to the poverty and oppression black people faced. In the newly independent African states, black ministers ruled but poverty and repression continued - to the benefit of the multinational corporations exploiting the continent.

Back in Lagos during the 1970s, with his music now influenced by

traditions from West Africa, Europe, Cuba and the USA, he developed his own Afrobeat style. His lyrics became increasingly political, denouncing poverty, corruption and military rule.

One example is ITT (International Thief Thief), released in 1979. Corporations like the US giant ITT -

Them go pick one African man
A man with low mentality
Them go give am million naira breads

To become of high position here
Him go bribe some thousand naira bread

To become one useless chief

....
Them go be:
Friend friend to journalist
Friend friend to Commissioner
Friend friend to Permanent Secretary

Friend friend to Minister
Friend friend to Head of State
Then start start to steal money
Start start them corruption
Start start them inflation
Start start them oppression
Like Obasanjo and Abiola
[Chorus] International Thief Thief!

General Olusegun Obasanjo was military dictator and Moshood Abiola was vice-president of ITT, later being elected as president of Nigeria, although prevented from assuming office by the military.

Fela! is a brilliant musical, set in his Lagos club, the Shrine. It gives

the feel for his nightly performances where pulsating rhythms from drums and bass, percussion and brass, biting political lyrics and exuberant dancing, were interspersed with sharp humour.

The first part of the show is enormously entertaining. In one number, dancers athletically circle the stage while reading political books! The mood of the second part is angrier and at times sombre. Fela's massive popularity with songs like ITT and Zombie, attacking the military (which caused a riot when he played it at a packed stadium in Ghana), made him a target for the ruling regime.

His club was frequently raided. He was beaten and repeatedly imprisoned.

Eventually 1,000 soldiers attacked his compound, burning it down, raping his wives and throwing his elderly mother from an upstairs window to her death.

The play finishes with Coffin for Head of State, where Fela and his Movement of the People delivered an effigy of his mother's coffin to General Obasanjo's barracks. The cast carry many more coffins, each labelled with a different slogan, including "Stop the Cuts".

Fela! is at the National Theatre in London until 23 January and broadcast live from there at many independent cinemas on 13-15 January. See it and start 2011 with a roar of defiance!

Little sympathy for Murdoch

VINCE CABLE talks a good war. He declared war on right-wing media magnate Rupert Murdoch to a couple of undercover hacks from the Telegraph. This was over Murdoch's plans to take total control of BSkyB. Then instead of going on the offensive Cable retreated with his tail between his legs. The first war in history to be fought by unconditional surrender.

Derek McMillan

There have been calls for Cable's resignation from newspapers owned by a certain Mr Murdoch.

Now there's a spooky coincidence.

Those who watched the recent debate on tuition fees will remember battling Cable's role in that farce. Cameron and Clegg might as well have been pulling his strings as he mouthed their policies and tried to look sincere.

Interestingly the Jeremy Vine Show on Radio Two specifically asked listeners to call in with comments supporting poor Mr Murdoch. There were none.

Some recalled the lies Murdoch told about the Hillsborough football disaster - lies insulting and demonising Liverpool fans. Lies which the Sun later withdrew.

Others drew attention to Murdoch's Fox News which is a continual right-wing rant rather than a news channel.

Listeners also drew attention to Silvio Berlusconi in Italy who used his media empire to silence opposition to his corrupt repressive government.

Another said Dennis Potter had the right idea when he named his pancreatic cancer "Rupert". Perhaps the best comment appeared, ironically, on the Sky News website: "I love Sky. Whatever they say, I believe. Tell me what to think next Mr Murdoch?"