

thesocialistpostbag

Do you have something to say?

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an important step towards the TUC-backed demonstration in London on 26 March. That could pave the way for a one-day public sector general strike, like the one in Spain last year. March/protest/rally - Saturday 12 February, 11am, starting from the 'Feather' sculpture, West Gate, Mansfield. At Mansfield Market Place there will be guest speakers.

Karen Seymour

"Scope for deletion"

How about this for a contender for the most sickening example of management speak? Staff who are at risk of redundancy at the City of London Corporation are referred to as being "in scope for deletion"! Workers' reactions vary from a sullen feeling of powerlessness to seething anger. I predict a big turnout on the TUC national demo in London on 26 March.

A London local government worker

What means tests mean

A friend of my mother, Bettie, had an elderly neighbour who was infirm. Bettie used to help her with shopping and washing. She was surprised to find the airing cupboard full of sheets and asked "Why do you have so many sheets?" Her neighbour explained that: "If the guardians found you had sheets in the cupboard they stopped your relief. I dreamed about having sheets in the airing cupboard." This shows what the means test means to many people who can still remember it.

John Sharpe

No to cuts in Notts

On 24 February the Tory-led Nottinghamshire county council will set its budget for the coming year. It plans to make eye-watering cuts that will devastate local jobs and services. The proposed closures of Warsop and Edwinstowe fire stations will undoubtedly put lives at risk. The bankers who created this mess, who have had endless bailouts of public money and massive bonuses, should pay, not ordinary people. The student protests against the raising of university tuition fees and the axing of EMA show the anger that is building against the cuts. Our anti-cuts protest, and others like it, will be

Hypocrite to speak at Stonewall



Teresa May, well known for speaking in parliament against gay rights and a proponent of water cannons for demonstrators, is speaking at the conference of lesbian, gay and bisexual charity Stonewall on 18 March. I'm not sure who is being more hypocritical, them for inviting her or her for agreeing to go! LGBT rights group Outrage! is organising a counter protest.

Robert Benson

Defending gay rights in Lithuania

The Lithuanian parliament has drafted a law that would punish the "public promotion of homosexual relations". Right wing politicians have been openly trying to whip up homophobia with inflammatory speeches and attempts to ban equality and gay pride marches. LGBT activists have been standing up bravely to this assault on their human rights. I was pleased to see that Joe Higgins, Socialist Party Ireland MEP spoke recently in the European Parliament, saluting their stand.

John Harris

• Watch a video of Joe's speech on socialistworld.net - eds

Review: Woody Sez

Woody Sez: the life and music of Woody Guthrie
Devised/directed by David M Lutken and Nick Corley
The Arts Theatre London, to 2 April

Reviewed by Manny Thain

THIS IS the tale of the legendary Woody Guthrie, a real folk hero. Born in Oklahoma in 1912 he has inspired countless singer/songwriters with songs of the working class and poor in the great depression of the 1930s and beyond.

This play, with David M Lutken in the lead accompanied by Darcie Deaville, Helen Russell and David Finch, lets the songs do most of the talking - packing in nearly 30. The set is sparse: a backdrop of photos, an array of musical instruments, with which the cast bring this rich story to life.

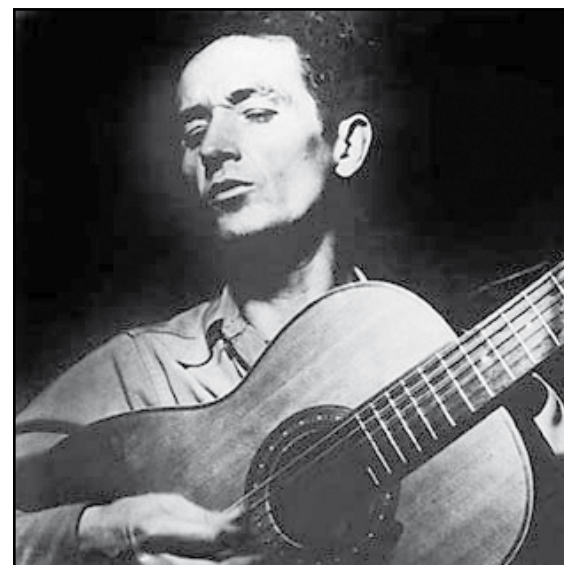
Woody's father, Charles, had been a property dealer, at times relatively comfortably off, at other times down-at-heel. His mother, Nora, ill for years with Huntingdon's disease, had a compulsion for setting things on fire. And, after burning down the family home, she was sent to the Oklahoma Hospital for the Insane, where she died in 1930.

Woody hit the road, writing songs of small farmers hit by dust storms, driven off the land by bankers and big business. He sang of strike-breaking thugs: "Tell me why does a vigilante man/Carry that sawn-off shotgun in his hand?/Would he shoot his brother and sister down?"

Although a time of terrible hardship, it was also one of great radicalisation, the rise of militant industrial unions: "This union maid was wise to the tricks of company spies/She couldn't be fooled by a company stool, she'd always organise the guys... Oh, you can't scare me I'm sticking to the union... Til the day I die." Woody became a fellow traveller of the Communist Party. The play's title, in fact, comes from the regular column he wrote in its newspaper, The Daily Worker.

In 1940 he wrote his most famous song, This Land is Your Land, as an antidote to God Bless America. He joined the merchant navy during the second world war, a move which shadowed the change in the CP line - following the end of the Hitler/Stalin pact when the Nazis invaded Russia in 1941. But what drove Woody most of all was his instinctive class solidarity with European workers. He emblazoned on his guitar: 'This machine kills fascists.'

From the late 1940s, Woody's behaviour became increasingly erratic, at times violent, as he succumbed to



Woody Guthrie

Huntingdon's. Hospitalised in 1956, he died in 1967.

Through all the heartache, this play is uplifting, a breath of fresh air, a celebration of working-class life, struggle and achievement. The Internationale rings out - not too common in London's West End. Woody Guthrie gave the voiceless a voice.

And these songs live on. Woody would seethe at the greed of today's bankers in today's great recession. He would recognise the camps in the US, filled with thousands driven out of their homes by the subprime mortgage rip-off.

Woody Guthrie once said: "I hate a song that makes you think that you are not any good. I hate a song that makes you think that you are just born to lose... No good for nothing. Because you are too old or too young or too fat or too slim, too ugly or too this or that... I am out to fight those songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood." And Woody Sez it all.

Readers' comments

Life on the autistic spectrum

AUTISM IS a neurological condition that was first identified in the 1940s. It statistically affects about one in 100 people in the UK alone (although I believe there are more autistics who haven't been diagnosed).

Lucy Stokes

The traits that autistics can have include finding that socialising doesn't come naturally, having a delay in learning how to talk (I couldn't talk until I was five or six), needing a regular routine, needing new things to be planned in advance, getting stressed easily by a disruption in routine and taking things too literally.

Other traits can be, hyper/hypo-sensitivity to things such as touch

and taste (that's why I'm teetotal), finding eye contact very disconcerting, being brutally honest and having difficulty in expressing emotions.

Autistics can have obsessions whether it is art, science or a TV show. No two autistics are the same though, this is why it's called the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (I prefer condition as there's nothing wrong with us).

Unfortunately services for adults on the autistic spectrum are minimal, close to none in fact. It seems as if you are no longer autistic once you reach 18 and counselling for autistics who suffer, for example, from depression is virtually non-existent for adults.

There are some organisations such as Autism Speaks, a "charity" which claims that autism is a ter-

rible disease, worse than AIDS and an epidemic. Autistics and their relatives can be fooled into supporting what they're saying. They are taking advantage of the fact that there are virtually no services whatsoever, largely so the top figures can pay themselves an inflated salary.

I blame this on capitalist society that only cares about profit, not people's needs. We are expected to conform to society and autistics can easily get discriminated against in work and education, and are more likely to be bullied.

In a socialist society, services would be accessible. Life would be less stressful as things are more likely to be planned and autistics will have more of a say in how things are run in services we rely on.

Sky, sexism and soccerettes

"THE GAME'S gone mad," said Andy Gray. Was he talking about the obscene amount of money (£214 million) spent in the January transfer window as Britain's economy shakes? No, he was talking about the idea of a woman officiating at a football match.

Suzanne Beishon

Andy Gray and Richard Keys have been the faces of Sky Sports since 1992. Gray was sacked after further evidence of sexism following the above incident in January. Keys also subsequently quit as clamour for his removal grew.

Is getting rid of Gray and Keys

the end of sexism at Sky Sports or in football? There is an increasing female presence in football, there are 853 women referees in England. However, only three officiate in professional football. As in many industries women are under-represented at the top level. Women hold senior positions in nearly every Premier League club but only five have female directors.

More women are attending football matches, 19% of people who attended games in 2008/9 season were women and, of those who started going to games within the past five years, 33% were women.

Sky Sports gallantly drove out Gray and Keys but Sky is no pioneer of fighting sexism. They still have

the 'soccerettes' on their Saturday morning show SoccerAM.

A 'soccerette' is a female fan who struts out in the football shirt of the team she supports with her favourite player's name on the back and the smallest shorts possible. She is then asked questions about herself and her team and is ranked out of five stars on the 'soccerettes' website. Sky is not interested in her football skills or sports knowledge.

I'm glad to see Gray and Keys go, but for Sky Sports to claim it is a champion of women's rights is a joke. Is it more realistic to look at the fact that Gray is suing Sky's sister paper News of the World over phone-hacking allegations?

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine February 2011 issue includes:

- **A new year of struggle**
We are now in an era of big social movements in Britain, argues Peter Taaffe.
- **The AV referendum**
How should socialists vote in May? Clive Heemskerk looks at the issues involved.
- **Wikileaks lessons**
Judy Beishon writes on Wikileaks, state repression, and the limits of the new media.



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