

the Socialist postbag

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.

Taking leave of our census?

The 2011 UK census has been contracted out. The ONS (Office for National Statistics) awarded the contract to US company Lockheed Martin, who will be paid £150 million to provide services including a customer contact centre, questionnaire printing and data capture and processing.

But Lockheed Martin is the world's second largest arms producer, making Trident nuclear missiles, cluster bombs and F-16 fighter jets. In the past it has been charged with illegally spying on US and British citizens. It reportedly works with the CIA and FBI.

This company has had thousands of law suits filed against it, everything from racial discrimination to fraud. It lobbied for the war in Iraq. It has been the main arms supplier to wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine which ended in the deaths of over a million people.

In Britain everyone is required by law to complete the census or face prosecution, a hefty fine of up to £1,000 and a criminal record. All data collected from the census is supposed to be protected for 100 years. Yet the US Patriot Act of 2001 allows the US government to gain access to any US-based company's data. What about privacy then?

Roy Crampton

Grimsby Socialist Party

Royal wedding blues

Hull council says it has received no applications to hold a street party to mark the wedding of one of the few young former student couples not saddled with thousands of pounds of debt. Lincolnshire received 16 applications compared with 120 in 1981.

There's a similar lack of interest nationwide despite many local authorities like Norfolk cutting the cost of submitting an application this year from £450 to £29.04 to encourage people to mark the wedding date. Strange priorities when councils threaten millions of pounds of cuts.

Chris Gittins, director of the Street Parties organisation claimed: "It's very difficult to plan for a street party in the winter when it's cold." Fortunately the TUC, the organisers of the biggest 'street party' in years did not use this reason to further delay last week's demo against the cuts.

The lack of support for street parties reflects a significant weakening of support for the monarchy which could be important if a future monarch tries to use his position to prop up capitalism in a time of crisis.

David Maples

south London

Big society?

The winter fuel allowance, to help with heating bills, was worth £250 for the over-60s. It has been cut to £200. It was £400 for the over-80s, now it will be £300. The Tories and their Liberal

chums chopped it to save some £600 million. A drop in the ocean compared to the corporation tax cuts to help the richest in the "big society"

The trade unions condemned this hypocritical action. The government promised with tears in their eyes that the pensioners would not be punished. That was before the election of course.

Clegg, Cameron and Miliband have no problem keeping warm. They generate enough hot air between them. They should not be allowed to get away with this.

When the trade unions give a lead they can bring hundreds of thousands out onto the streets. The people need not be afraid of the government. The government ought to be afraid of the people. Now that's what I call a big society.

Derek McMillan

Mid Sussex Socialist Party

Oh Mr Porter

NUS President Aaron Porter recently came to Leicester University to open the students union (SU) after a £16 million refurbishment turned the building into an O2 Academy filled with expensive 'classy' restaurants and bars.

The SU wanted to attract more post-graduate students to use facilities on campus. But overpriced for the average student budget, many stopped going to the shops and cafes and the union started losing money.

Unable to cover the cost, SU management sacked staff - many of them non-unionised students. Socialist Students protested at this, calling on the university to use its reserves to help the SU, giving it time to save jobs while it reduced prices to make it more affordable for students. The vice-chancellor said they didn't have enough money despite having £70 million in reserves.

Porter and the vice chancellor opened the SU officially by closing it for the day! While they sipped champagne inside with the SU executive and university management, students were refused entry.

Porter would rather hobnob with people making cuts and setting £9,000 tuition fees than lead any campaign. We need an NUS that's willing to lead students in a fightback against this government's attacks!

Alex Moore

Leicester

Labour Tories

The Con-Dems' Welfare Reform Bill is a nasty piece of legislation attacking the poor and vulnerable. Surely the Labour opposition would vote against its progress through the House of Commons on 9 March, particularly after it was shown that even cancer sufferers will be worse off under this bill having to wait six months before they can claim benefit, just when they urgently need financial support.

Unfortunately, Ed Miliband instructed

Labour MPs to abstain on the bill because the Labour leadership wants to give this reform a chance and also to appear tough on welfare.

Most of the Labour opposition duly carried out their leader's instructions and abstained - just eleven of them voted against. It makes you wonder why any Labour supporters see Ed Miliband as a swing to the left or think that his party has anything to offer the working class.

Rob Bishop

Speaking to Cameron

When members of Unison Health and Bucks Save Our Services (SOS) were out talking to people in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire about cuts to local services, David Cameron appeared in town. A number of people said 'why don't we go and speak to him'.

He was finally spotted outside a local multinational coffee shop. Steve Bell, Unison Health and Bucks SOS secretary, told him the local Bucks health economy faces a £140 million shortfall. Steve also pointed out that Bucks NHS spending was 17% lower than the national average meaning that local people do not get the services they pay for.

Cameron said that the NHS spend was not being cut and there was a 0.1% increase over the next few years and that both Oxfordshire where he lives and Bucks were funded below the average and that we needed to speak to our local MPs. Steve replied that he'd been doing this for the last six years and the cuts continued. We were then asked to leave by security staff as Cameron was having 'family time'.

Our politicians are out of touch, that is why we need to campaign to protect our public services. They are not safe in their hands.

Bucks Unison and SOS activists

Blood service

The National Blood Service tells blood donors of the importance of regularly donating to keep sufficient stocks to meet anticipated demand.

Recently when I attended the Birmingham Blood Donor Centre to make a donation I was shocked to hear the receptionist tell two people that they couldn't donate without an appointment because there weren't enough staff to deal with them.

Blood is sometimes in short supply and donors are being turned away. Another example of the Con-Dem government defending frontline services?

Clive Walder

Birmingham Socialist Party

Congratulations

I think the new style of the Socialist (Issue 663) is an excellent improvement. Looks clearer, better layout and thus more interesting. Well done!

Rob

Gloucestershire

Save Sure Start services



Children get the message across! photo Save Our Childrens Services

Elizabeth O'Hara

Around 30 supporters of the Save Our Children's Services - Westminster campaign marched on the 26 March TUC demonstration. Children from a local nursery used handprints to make t-shirts and placards saying 'hands off our services'. The demo will give a huge boost to hundreds of campaigns like ours everywhere.

Our campaign was set up earlier in March by parents and carers to oppose the local council's plans to cut the borough's Sure Start children's services by, on average, £50 a child next year. This is despite the prime minister's assurance that children's centres would not suffer from spending cuts.

11 £ million in the council reserves

Westminster says central government funding for Sure Start has been reduced so the council must also cut its budget, but we don't accept our services must be cut as a result. In Westminster there is money for some things but not for others. The council says it needs to save around £0.75 million from its Sure Start budget. Yet, it has over £11 million in reserves.

The council spends £10.5 million a year on highly paid consultants and the council admits that some top council officers earn more than the prime minister. Nonetheless, the council plans to increase charges for children's holiday play schemes from £22 a week to £120 a week - up 545%. They would also raise charges for children's after school play provision from £8.30 a week to £30 a week - a 360% increase.

Our campaign asked every councillor to vote against cutting the Sure Start budget. Yet at the March meeting, elected councillors voted

through a 20% cut to children's services, while rejecting a proposal to reduce their own allowances by 10%.

We forced Westminster to publish an additional consultation document, extend the consultation period and hold additional consultation meetings with parents. But there is still everything to fight for. We demand that Westminster council uses its reserves to ensure no cuts to children's services in the borough.

Please send protest messages to Nicola Aiken, Westminster council cabinet member for Children & Young People, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP or to info@westminster.gov.uk, with copies to the campaign: socswestminster@gmail.com or SOCSW, 3A Lydford Road, London W9 3LU.

A Strategy to Defeat the Cuts



A new Socialist Party pamphlet. Essential reading for all anti-cuts campaigners.

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