

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.

Seasonal ailments

A workmate asked me the other day how I was. I said fine except for the seasonal ailment I get which is hayfever. I did not have time to go through the other seasonal ailments I have this year which include haversack shoulder from carrying a haversack on the 26 March demo, demonstration knee from the same source along with chanters' throat. The worst however is canvassers' elbow, sustained holding leaflets and copies of the Socialist while canvassing in elections. I have discussed these problems with a number of comrades, and, although I am somewhat doubtful, they assure me that the cure is to continue to march, chant, leaflet and canvass for at least another month after which all these conditions will improve dramatically, at least for a while.

Pete
West Midlands

Disabled hit hardest

The government claims that "we are all in this together" and that "front-line services will be protected." A new survey commissioned by the pressure group, Inclusion London, gives the lie to that assertion.

They estimate that "The total financial impact of the package of proposed cuts on disabled people in London could equate to a possible 20-35% loss in income."

The income of disabled people in London is already almost £50 a week less than the income of non-disabled people. The public sector employs a large number of people with disabilities so the cuts will fall harder on them.

That is why there was a contingent of trade unionists with disabilities on the 26 March demonstration. They cannot afford not to fight back against this heartless government. Only together can we defeat them.

Derek McMillan

**Privatisation can kill**

On 1 April, the Nottingham NHS service, Health In Mind, was sold off to the newly established Social Enterprise that came into effect on the same day, therefore privatising the service. Health In Mind is a mental health service providing essential care to people suffering from a broad range of mental disabilities, including work-related illnesses like depression and anxiety.

Around 40 service workers and users along with Unison and GMB contingents attended a protest outside Standard Court on 1 April. This was covered by local TV crews and press. What was most striking about the protest was the mood for strike action to defend those relying on the service and the rights of the workers, who will have to reapply for their jobs on reduced terms and conditions.

Already there is evidence of working people's consciousness having been raised since the TUC march. One worker told me some of the patients they treat will die as a result of this privatisation, illustrating not only that the cuts are going to turn back all the gains of working people, but are a matter of life and death for society's most vulnerable.

Henry Allen
Nottingham East Socialist Party

Austerity measures take away the basics

Karen Seymour

Opened in 1983, Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres, where I am training as an adviser, provide welfare rights and debt advice to some of Derbyshire's most deprived communities.

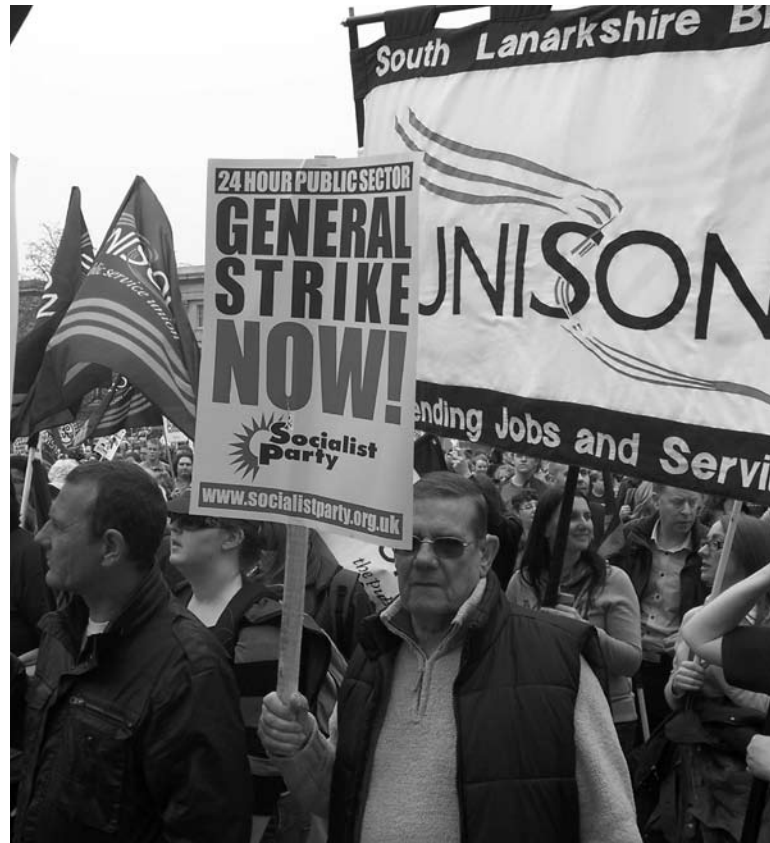
We get many enquiries about Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Some are about filling out the massively complicated forms, or, more commonly these days, appealing the decisions of Atos Origin, the company with a multi-million pound contract with the Department for Work and Pensions to provide 'work capability assessments' (WCAs).

Mental health charity Mind's chief executive says that WCAs are "flawed" and that the stress of going through the process could exacerbate some people's mental health problems.

The sole reason for bringing in ESA seems to be to force people with health problems, often chronic and sometimes terminal, onto the far less generous Jobseeker's Allowance and the compulsion to find work which comes with that.

Governments (and it was New Labour who introduced ESA) say work is the route out of poverty, but do nothing about discriminating employers who won't give people with health problems a chance. Further, the right-wing media's demonisation of unemployed, ill and disabled people has created a situation where people are systematically impoverished, then blamed for their predicament.

Tory Derbyshire county council has now cut a quarter of our bud-



If not stopped, cuts will wreck lives photo Alison Hill

et, around £33,000. This will mean fewer opening hours for some of our centres. Madness, when we can see the number of inquiries increase. For those who live in the communities we cover, the cuts will take away the basics. Our centres are a lifeline for people who have next to nothing. These cuts will wreck lives.

When told our funding has been slashed, some people seem genuinely scared, and say they don't

know what they will do without us. Furthermore, despite the hardship some people face, our donations have increased, shaming councillors who want to cut our service to the bone.

As people begin to realise what 'austerity measures' mean for themselves and their families, they're looking for alternatives. The Socialist Party's message, that we will fight all cuts and all job losses, will resonate.

Labour 'campaigning' - casework style

Linda Taaffe

Around 50 elderly residents of sheltered accommodation, some support staff and relatives were protesting at Waltham Forest Labour council's decision to implement Tory cuts by picking on the old and vulnerable.

Wardens were to be axed, telephone calls substituted for knocks on the door, and a host of other trimmings of the service. One lady said she'd lived in her block for 17 years and once had everything. 'Now look what it's come to.'

Two local Labour MPs sat at the top table. These two worthies came hoping to head up a campaign but they headed it off! The only real issue for them was getting the best way of implementing cuts and making sure every resident had their say in a sham consultation exercise. It was only fair!

They promised to find out answers to the many queries and had three personal assistants collecting names and addresses so all could have a personal response. It was opposition by casework not campaign.

Both were at pains to make clear they really hated the Tories, and denounced Nick Clegg for having two faces! They said they "wished and wished" these cuts did not have to be made. They wanted to make the best of a bad job... and no more.



Lobbying Waltham Forest council photo Paul Mattsson

They distanced themselves from Labour councillors saying they had no remit to influence them. What kind of party lets the old and frail suffer?

Many of the old folk were clearly afraid of being alone. No wonder. Already three residents had been discovered dead on the floor. But never a word passed the councillors' lips about stopping the cuts through a serious campaign.

At a recent council lobby the GMB union revealed that £40.1 million is in this council's reserves. Even the council leader grudgingly agreed there was £10 million. A Socialist

Party member and Anti-Cuts Union activist asked why couldn't some of this money be used to maintain these vitally needed services, and was given a huge round of applause. The question was ignored even when a resident demanded the question be answered.

At the end of the meeting, after saying that every matter raised would be duly investigated and replies communicated, one MP said: "...and to the lady at the back, I will find out the answer and get back to you"! No doubt on House of Commons notepaper. And that will be the end of that.

Review: Shadows Over a People

The opening day for the 'Shadows' photo exhibition by Herdi Ali at Worcester University, 16 March, was also the anniversary of the Saddam Hussein regime's infamous attack on the Kurdish city of Halabja in 1988.

Herdi Ali fled his homeland, settling in Britain. But he travelled recently to Kurdistan to record the situation of people of the "remote Qandil mountain area".

What stands out are the tents with UNHCR (the UN refugee agency) in large letters. So in 20 years UNHCR can manage tents and some food. The attack on Halabja was carried out with various types of gas and resulted in 5,000 deaths, the destruction of a city, and trauma, blindness and disfigurement for successive generations.

The Kurdish people have since suffered the oppression of the Turkish and Iranian regimes. The photos record a people living with no modern infrastructure, no roads, electricity, education facilities or oil lamps for lighting. No doctors, no pharmacy, and no decent toilets. It's like a scene from another age.

One child holds a pistol in his

The Kurds remain the world's largest nation with no land of their own.

hand, his face is not shown, is he trying to make sense of it or has the gun become so commonplace, it's a toy?

This exhibition finished in Worcester at the end of March but it could be used elsewhere. Herdi is a lifelong socialist and has the scars to prove it. Saddam Hussein thought he could punish and intimidate the Kurds, others have tried to do the same.

The Kurds remain the world's largest nation with no land of their own, 80 million live in areas of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, their language, culture and civilisation extend back thousands of years. Herdi Ali has produced a reminder of their struggle which deserves every socialist's attention.

Pete McNally,
Worcester Socialist Party