

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.

Hypocrisy

Up to 70 people demonstrated outside Northcliffe House (publishers of the Daily Mail) recently as part of a nationwide campaign against cuts in disability benefits.



People pointed out the hypocrisy of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money being spent on the royal wedding (surely the real scroungers) while cutting the benefits for many disabled and vulnerable people.

The Daily Mail blames benefit claimants as workshy scroungers, labels people claiming benefits as making a 'lifestyle choice' while sycophantically fawning over the royal couple.

There were also shouts of 'Nazi scum' as a reference to the Mail's history in supporting fascism in the 1930s.

Keith Hussey
Harpenden

No alternative

Question: What's the difference between the Con-Dems and New Labour?
Answer: Less than 5%!

In Sheffield the Lib Dem council voted through £84 million cuts for 2011-12. Labour's amendment was for £81.6 million cuts.

In York, the Lib Dems and Tories voted through £21 million cuts. Labour's alternative was £20 million.

Terry Abbott

Still no alternative

A hustings event was held in Norwich on 20 April where representatives of the Green and Labour parties were the only ones who bothered to turn up. They needn't have bothered, because neither party was willing to commit to a 'needs budget', a budget based on the services required, not on the government's demands for cuts.

Labour vaguely stated that they would 'make the best of a bad situation and live to fight another day' with the Greens seeking to 'prioritise which services to cut and which to keep'.

These are not the alternatives that the electorate seek - these are definitive statements of intent to willingly carry out Con-Dem attacks on workers, families and young people.

In addition to this, both the Green Party and the Labour Party are affiliates in the very respected Norfolk Coalition Against Cuts. Surely their credentials, when making such declarations, are questionable.

Mick Duffin

Political... and interesting

York Socialist Party had a varied and enthusiastic response from local people while campaigning vigorously on behalf of TUSC. We've made the point that all three parties have plans to make devastating cuts to York's public services.

One man on the stall asked what he

could do to 'piss off the Tory candidate next door.' We told him that a nice big TUSC poster would look great in his window and he agreed, and gave a donation.

Another chased two comrades down the street to thank us for putting something political, yet interesting through his door. We hope the fightback in York will keep letting us have interesting conversations with residents and raise class consciousness in the area. Solidarity!

Martin Readle

Fighting cuts in Bristol

Giving out Trade Unionists and Socialists Against Cuts candidates' "no cuts" leaflets in Bristol, two lads drinking cider in their front garden asked me if there was an alternative to cuts. Minutes later they were asking how they went about voting for me.

A guy fixing his bike asked if I was the anti-cuts candidate and, when I said yes, wished me the best of luck. Finally a woman followed me up the street to say she was going to vote for me. She'd wanted to vote for me at the general election but decided to vote Labour at the last minute. However, she said, this time she was totally fed up of Labour offering her nothing.

All this was in just one short street! But these scenes are replicated across the city, showing support in the local elections for an alternative to the three big business parties.

Tom Baldwin

The 'best film ever made'



A new version of the film Battleship Potemkin is coming out. The publicity says: "In the 80 years since its release, it has been censored, modified, shortened, compromised, but now, a ten-year restoration is complete. We lift the veil on Battleship Potemkin with a newly recorded version of the original 1926 symphonic score."

The famous mutiny on the Potemkin was a significant part of the 1905 Russian revolution. Producer Sergei Eisenstein's reconstruction of the drama was part of the Soviet Union's 20th anniversary celebrations of those events. It has since often been hailed by film critics as the best film ever made. At the time, its revolutionary message was clear to all. Most governments - including Britain's - banned it for many years.

See it from 29 April to 30 June at BFI Southbank and Curzon Renouir in London or IFI Dublin. Watch out for other venues - or at very least find a cheap DVD of the existing version. At Southbank, Potemkin is part of a major season of Russian/Soviet Union films that might be interesting, even given the dictatorial hand of Stalin after the 1920s.

Andy Beadle

Management failures force school strike

Paul Gerrard
Bury NUT

On 7 April 70 teachers, members of teaching unions NUT and NASUWT, went on joint strike at Darwen Vale High School, Blackburn, Lancashire, and closed the school. The strike was widely reported, particularly since the issue was pupil behaviour.

The Daily Mail decried the "new low in Britain's education system" and linked it to a speech by the Director of the British Chambers of Commerce about - you guessed it - 'school leavers unfit for work'. Are things really that bad in the school?

According to Ofsted's June 2010 inspection: "behaviour as observed by inspectors on corridors, around the school site and in most lessons is good". For all Ofsted's faults, this judgement was probably not wide of the mark. What happened in between then and now was the appointment of a new head.

Under the new regime the autumn term saw a rapid decline in behaviour in the school, especially over the issue of mobile phones and the disruption caused in lessons. The school's policy was to confiscate them if students were found using them in lessons, and for them to be returned at the end of the day. But some persistent offenders successfully demanded phones back from senior staff before the end of the day, and the teachers felt undermined by management.

At the same time several members of staff were suspended where pupils had maliciously alleged assault. Apart from the disruptive effect on education this will have cost the school a fortune in supply teachers,



Striking against the cuts which threaten education photo Naomi Byron

which may go some way to explaining the large deficit at the head's previous school in Knowsley.

Simon Jones, secretary of Blackburn with Darwen NUT and NUT executive member, spoke to the Socialist: "No one wants to demonise the children here, they are no better or no worse than any others. The biggest difference between this school and other schools is the management failure to support staff."

Simon also pointed to pressures facing many young people as the cuts start to bite, which can lead to more challenging behaviour. Firstly, the reductions in many central support agencies such as educational psychologists and behaviour support teams who can assist with more disturbed or disruptive pupils.

The local authority excluded their own widely respected and effective behaviour support team from involvement in the school, preferring

to side with the head. Apparently it wouldn't do to be recognising the value of the team when it is being run down.

Secondly, a wave of redundancies, or the threat of them, is causing stress in many families. In former mill, engineering and paper-making towns like Blackburn and Darwen, 40% of jobs are now in the public sector and 1,900 have already been lost locally.

Finally, the actions the government has taken since coming to power have all undermined the aspirations of working class pupils.

When Blackburn's sixth formers demonstrated against university fee increases before Christmas, their class awareness was expressed in the slogan: 'Education for the masses, not just for the higher classes.' Meanwhile, though no dates have been set, further strikes are not ruled out.

Not much bread but there's plenty of circuses

Derek McMillan
Our Royal Correspondent

The Roman Emperors dealt with economic crisis with a policy of 'bread and circuses.' The Con-Dems are determined to leave out the bread and just give us the circuses. Witness the media torrent of sickly sentimentality over the royal wedding.

Much has been made of Premier Cameron's deliberations over whether he looks better as a lounge lizard or a stuffed shirt. Serious stuff. It makes Cameron look a fool which is no bad thing but it diverts attention from the realities of the state of the Con-Dem Nation.

We should be grateful that, although the country cannot afford health, welfare, education, libraries or pensions, at least we can afford for two over-privileged parasites to live like pigs in clover. It's romantic isn't it?

And of course the media Royal Correspondents stress that Middleton is "a commoner". About as common as hen's teeth in fact. The Middletons are from an elite, every bit as remote from the 'common people' as the Windsors.

The significance of "blue blood"



Making mugs of us...

is that in the past the royals and the aristos had pale skin because they did not work outside like the peasantry so their blue veins were more likely to be visible. None of the millionaire Middletons has to turn an honest day's work and indeed they look to expand their business empire with their royal

connections.

On the other hand it is important for the Windsors to bring new blue blood into the family as is all too evident in Prince Charles and Prince Philip. Daft as a pair of Poundland brushes.

So watch the royal circus and enjoy it. After all you paid for it!