

The Hardest Hit march and rally

Adrian Picton

I attended the disabled people's protest in central London on Wednesday 11 May as part of a group organised by the Royal National Institute of the Blind. At the rally at the end there were a couple of good disabled activists among the speakers.

Maria Miller, Tory minister for disabled people had chosen to attend prime minister's questions in preference to meeting the people she is supposed to represent and, as you can imagine, this didn't go down well with the crowd.

Labour's shadow secretary for work and pensions, Liam Byrne, did speak. He made a point of stating his disapproval of the way the for-profit company Atos was assessing people as being fit for work, including, for example, people with cancer. This, of course, was breath-taking hypocrisy since Labour introduced the Work Capacity Assessment in October 2008.

I had an appointment with my MP, Toby Perkins, Labour MP for Chesterfield. Also in attendance was a disabled woman with her husband. This woman had just had her care package cut from 58 hours to 19 hours a week by Derbyshire County Council. Toby acknowledged that

this was having a significant effect upon her and her husband, who is her main carer. He arranged to meet them privately to discuss how to pursue this situation.

I then talked about the changes to welfare benefits proposed in the government's Welfare Reform Bill, including the migration of people from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance. Toby agreed that the actions of Atos were unacceptable and that they were assessing many people inappropriately.

When I pointed out that it was the previous Labour government who brought in the test he claimed that if they were still in power they wouldn't be letting Atos get away with the kind of behaviour they are doing currently.

However, he did not see anything wrong with the system brought in by the last government and said he agreed with the concept of the Work Capacity Assessment.

I also talked about the proposed changes to Disability Living Allowance and the fact that this would mean many people would lose their benefit or have it reduced, even though the benefit doesn't even currently meet all the additional costs of disability.

I then asked Toby how he intend-



On the 11 May demo against the cuts photo Paul Mattsson

ed to vote on the Welfare Reform Bill. He said he couldn't give an answer at present as he needed to consult with his front bench colleagues and that it was difficult as he agreed with some parts of the bill.

This only serves to highlight further that the difference between

Labour and the Con-Dems is not significant.

Despite me and my friend, Liz, having to march without assistance, it was great to be part of what is believed to be the biggest ever march of disabled people - estimated, even by the police, at 8,000.



photo Paul Mattsson

Chancellor George Osborne's fan club (around 350 people) rallied in central London on Saturday 14 May to demand more cuts in public services.

The embryonic English 'Tea Party' included the TaxPayer's Alliance and Ukip's leader Nigel Farage. The protest attracted much mainstream media coverage despite the minuscule event being eclipsed by the TUC's anti-cuts demonstration of over 500,000 trade unionists on 26 March.

Iraq war: Labour's lie machine

A former British senior intelligence officer claims that Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair's former spin doctor, 'sexed up' the Labour government's 'dodgy dossier' in 2002 to include the bogus threat that the Saddam Hussein regime could launch weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against British interests within 45 minutes.

The dossier, which included an introduction by Blair saying the document established "beyond doubt" that Iraq had WMD, was used to justify war against Iraq the following year.

In January 2010 Campbell told the Chilcot inquiry into the cause of the war that the 'facts' in the dossier hadn't been twisted to justify the ensuing war. However, in evidence to the inquiry, the Director General of Defence Intelligence, major-general Michael Laurie, flatly contradicted

Campbell's version of events.

Laurie told the inquiry: "Alistair Campbell said to the inquiry that the purpose of the dossier was not to make a case for war. I had no doubt at that time this was exactly its purpose and these very words were used.

"We knew at the time that the purpose of the dossier was precisely to make a case for war, rather than setting out the available intelligence, and that to make the best out of sparse and inconclusive intelligence, the wording was developed with care."

Having 'made the facts fit the war', the US-British governments' invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, a bloody sectarian civil war, regional instability, and increased terrorism internationally.

Teachers' strike stops job cuts

Alistair Tice

National Union of Teachers (NUT) members at Rawmarsh Community School in Rotherham have secured victory in their fight to stop compulsory redundancies. The new headteacher had wanted over 30 redundancies, including 25 teachers, to cut a management created deficit.

NUT members took nine days of strike action which reduced the threatened job losses to four teachers, of which the only NUT member was Ralph Dyson, the union rep at the school.

Action was then resumed after Easter with three more strike days and a further three-day and then five-day strike planned. This determined stance finally forced the head to back down and accept a compromise that keeps Ralph as a teacher at the school.

Whilst teachers have made concessions to help avoid compulsory redundancies, there is absolutely no doubt that it is only through the NUT members' strike action and

solidarity that this victory has been achieved. That will inspire and give confidence to teachers elsewhere to fight the cuts.

At the same time, it's been a disgrace that the head has been backed by the Labour-led local education authority in not only making the cuts, but victimising the trade union rep at the school.

Ralph would like to thank all those who have given support and backing: "At times we have felt deeply humbled and proud by the support, advice and backing we have received. We know that the fight is not yet over and there are many hurdles to overcome. So may we take this opportunity to thank you all from all of us here at Rawmarsh Community School NUT.

"Without the above, the fight would have been a lot lonelier place to be and harder to fight for. At times when the resolve has been shaky your backing has been comforting and inspirational. The whole experience has been life changing and learnt us a lot about ourselves and others. It has given us the energy and motivation to keep up the fight."

Pay gap grows ever wider

'Under capitalism the rich get richer and the poor get poorer'. Merely Marxist propaganda? Not so. A new report by the high pay commission shows that the wage gap between UK's highest earners and the rest of workers will soon be as wide as in Victorian times.

According to the commission the top 0.1% of earners will see their pay rise from 5% to 14% of national income by 2030. The last time this concentration of wealth was seen was in the early 1900s.

Last year according to the report the average salary of corporate fat cats was over £3,747,000. This sum

is over 145 times greater than the national median full time wage of £25,800.

The report says the trend is likely to see a further widening of this gap to 214 times by 2020.

Undoubtedly, right wing trade union leaders will seize upon such figures as strengthening the call for a return of a Labour government.

However, recent figures published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies show that income inequality between rich earners and the majority of workers accelerated under the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Fast news

Losing your home

More evidence that the government's austerity measures are pushing the economy back into recession comes from the latest house repossession figures. These show a 15% leap in repossessions in the first quarter of 2011 - some 9,100 properties.

The Council for Mortgage Lenders expects repossessions for the whole of 2011 to be around 40,000 - up on the 36,300 recorded in 2010.

The Ministry of Justice also produced figures last week that showed repossession claims in courts in England and Wales rose for the third consecutive quarter in January-March this year. 20,034 claims were made - 8% higher than in the same period in 2010. Needless to say it is the squeeze on incomes through rising unemployment as well as pay cuts at the same time as hikes in energy, food and fuel bills that have pushed people into indebtedness.

Another big factor causing mortgage arrears is the government decision to halve the payment rate for support for mortgage interest (SMI) last October. SMI is a support paid to people on income support, jobseeker's allowance or pension credit and with mortgages of less than £200,000.

Police dummies

London Met police marksmen are to be issued with hollow point or 'dum dum' bullets. The ammunition, which typically instantly kills the victim, has been outlawed in wars under the 1899 Hague Declaration.

According to the London Evening Standard: "Police experts say there is less risk of injuries to innocent parties and bystanders" using these bullets. The tragic irony of this sentence seems to be lost on the Standard as this type of ammunition was used to assassinate innocent party Jean Charles de Menezes in Stockwell underground station in a botched anti-terrorist operation by Met police in 2005. After this fatal shooting the dum dum ammunition was withdrawn. But "after 12 weeks testing" (on who?) the police are reintroducing it.

Hire and fire

Brian Coleman, Tory councillor and London fire boss, claimed an outrageous £3,500 in expenses for taxi and car journeys on top of his £120,000 earnings.

'Grab-a-cab Coleman' is also notorious for his political bile aimed at the capital's firefighters. Last year he threatened Fire Brigades Union (FBU) members with mass sackings unless they agreed to unacceptable changes in working practices, while at the same time hypocritically accusing the FBU of 'thuggish' behaviour.

Gold service

What does a private rail transport company do faced with an increased demand for its services during the 2012 London Olympics? You've guessed right, it cuts its services!

Southeastern intends to slash the number of trains during week days between 28 July and 12 August 2012 in south east London, including closing the Woolwich Dockyard station.

It seems that Southeastern, with its high fares and overcrowded trains, is now trying to establish a new record for the worst rail service ever.