

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.

Miliband's 'right tone'

On the train on the way back from the 30 June Birmingham demo I overheard Ed Miliband (he was travelling second class with the common folk!) say that he thought he had struck the right tone when speaking at the local government conference, also in Birmingham earlier that day. Shame he couldn't make the rally in Victoria Square - a few thousand teachers may not have agreed with him.

Clive  
Coventry East Socialist Party

Leaders behind us?

What a day of strike action on 30 June. It shows what we can do! In the run-up and on the day, I have never had so many members of my Unison branch come up to me and ask 'why on earth aren't we taking action as well?' With a couple of other Unison members, we visited our local DWP office round the corner from work to show support to PCS members. We chatted about Unison and why we weren't on strike as well. They were miffed about the situation, and angry. We joked that it was like the scene in the comedy Blackadder Goes Forth (set in a WW1 trench), where General Melchett says to Private Baldrick, 'we are right behind you' and Blackadder quips 'about 35 miles behind you!' A picket said perhaps Prentis was wearing a pair of pants on his head with pencils shoved up his nose repeating the word 'wibble', like Blackadder did, trying to get out of the fight.

A Unison steward  
Coventry

Interview marred

Is it just me or was the 'interview' by Andrew Marr of Tory education secretary Michael Gove a complete dereliction of journalistic duty? Gove said teachers should not go on strike as this would "disrupt family life". Andrew Marr should at least have objected, maybe saying "Just a moment Govey old chap, aren't your government sacking half a million public sector workers? Just possibly that might have a disruptive effect on their family life?" But he didn't. He let Gove repeat the same point several times without pointing out the glaring hypocrisy of such remarks. Clearly, with this standard of journalism, we will have to make such arguments ourselves through the Socialist.

Pete  
Worcester

Painful cuts

Five-year-old Harmony-Mae has a painful spinal condition, spondylolisthesis for which her mother receives a carer's allowance and disability living allowance. Her mother Claire has just been told her benefits have been slashed by £800 a month in the government's shake-up of the welfare system. Claire now relies on charity to pay for parts of her daughter's care which the NHS doesn't cover. She is attempting to raise £3,000 to pay for a special mattress and a buggy so her daughter can sleep without pain and travel comfortably to and from school. Without these her daughter is often in too much pain to get out of bed or walk, so her schooling is also suffering. This government of cuts doesn't give a damn about disabled people or their

carers and is prepared to trample on their futures to protect the profits of the wealthy. Vulnerable people will suffer until they are defeated.

Dave Younger

A different approach

People are angry with the banking crisis, inequality and the cuts. However, I don't think we'll win support for a socialist society through just playing on people's anger and pointing out the flaws in capitalism. I think we need a different approach. We should point out that socialism means people can spend more time with their families. They would no longer have to work longer and longer hours to try to keep up with bills and ever increasing debt repayments. Ideas and creativity flourish under socialism rather than being stifled as people often mistakenly think. The main technological advancements of recent times (the computer, mobile phones, GPS, the internet, etc) were all imagined by sci-fi authors and engineered and built by governments, not private enterprise. Fill your website with hope. Educate the public on how things could be different. I'm not saying don't have pictures of protests on the site, just don't make them the only feature.

Dave S

Good value pamphlet

The anti-cuts pamphlet (A strategy to defeat the cuts by Hannah Sell) is a really excellent publication so I was inspired to sell it at our union branch, NHS stewards training days, the Unite United Left and the Unite regional committee. I sold 37 of them - I could sell it quite easily as 'good value' at only £1. I think we should produce more pamphlets like this and sell them round the movement. A good one would be on the anti-trade union laws or maybe the NHS.

Andy Ford  
Warrington

**socialist books**



A Strategy to Defeat the Cuts by Hannah Sell  
£1.40 including postage and packing.  
Available from  
Socialist Books  
PO Box 24697,  
London E11 1YD  
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Review  
A Common Treasury

Tony Benn presents: Gerrard Winstanley, "A Common Treasury", Verso £8  
Reviewed by Mike Cleverley

One of the false arguments against socialism and communism is that these ideas are 'foreign'. Karl Marx was a German Jew and a follower of the German philosopher Hegel. 'Revolution is something that happens in other countries', the 'British way' is 'evolutionary and not revolutionary'. Of course, Britain has a long tradition of popular uprising - we just don't learn much about these events at school or through the media. We may know that Charles I was beheaded and that after Oliver Cromwell died the monarchy was restored but the background to these events is both sketchy and misleading. Other revolutionary events, like the peasants' revolt, the Peterloo massacre, the Chartists and the 1926 general strike are often not even mentioned. This book presents the ideas of the Diggers, a group of rural communists who operated after the English civil war which led to the beheading of Charles I. It has a very readable introduction by Tony Benn though unfortunately I found the writings of Winstanley himself, which make up the bulk of the book, hard going. Benn is very sympathetic to the Diggers' ideas but offers no real way forward to workers today.



Cromwellian General Fairfax at the 'Putney Debates' in 1647

Diggers

The Diggers grew out of dissatisfaction with the Levellers who believed that property should be distributed equally but never took active steps to achieve this aim. The Diggers set out to establish communities who would cultivate common land and share in the produce equally. This was a time of great social ferment; the king was dead but what was to replace him? This is familiar to us. We can see how, in the Middle East and north Africa, corrupt regimes are overthrown but there are, as yet, no mass organisations capable of carrying the revolution forward to make real gains for the workers and the poor. In 1649 the Diggers began to plant vegetables in common land at St George's Hill, Weybridge, Surrey at a time of rapidly rising food prices. They invited all who were willing to work the land to join them and share equally in the food, drink and clothes that might be produced. Local landowners called on

Cromwell's New Model Army under Sir Thomas Fairfax, to intervene. Fairfax advised that the Diggers appeared to offer little threat to "good order" and suggested that the landowners use the courts. One Diggers' leader, William Everard, left at this point, sensing trouble. That sounds familiar to us today! Winstanley remained true to his ideals and kept writing about the problems the colony faced. The Lord of the Manor organised gangs to attack the Diggers, ruin their crops and destroy their homes. The Diggers were accused of being members of a banned religious sect, the Ranters, and taken before a magistrate. As was common then, they were not allowed to speak in their own defence. In this way they were forced to abandon St George's Hill. Some then tried again, at Cobham in Surrey, at Wellingborough and at Iver in Buckinghamshire. The Wellingborough Diggers published a declaration and in 1650 were imprisoned. Although no charges were ever laid the magistrate refused to release them. Further Digger colonies were set up at Barnet, Enfield, Dunstable, Bosworth and Nottinghamshire. But by 1651 the

Diggers' movement was finished, destroyed by the state and by persecution by landowners. The ideas of common ownership are part of the history of the working people of Britain and the mighty Chartist movement, which influenced Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, stood on the shoulders of the Diggers. In their 17th century days communist ideas were a powerful attraction to the poor but society then lacked three things necessary to make these ideas reality. Industrial technique is necessary to provide food, clothing and housing for all. The workers' solidarity created by modern production is a force strong enough to overcome the state machine protecting the ruling class. Finally a mass party of the working class, with a programme to attract all the exploited people in society has to be built to carry the revolution forward. A full working class account of the English Revolution would deal with the Levellers and Diggers in a much more readable format than this book. But the documents it brings to our notice are a valuable resource which the author of such a book will find useful.

Review – Endgame by Rise Against

Hannah Bastow

In 2010, Rise Against's lead singer Tim McIlrath said the band's motivation to tour almost continuously for the past eleven years was to influence the social conscience. This motivation is apparent in their latest album, Endgame. Rise Against's fan base may have grown beyond the disenfranchised youth and politically aware but they have not lost the cutting lyrics that make their message so powerful. 'Help is on the Way' is based on the devastating Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Many people were forgotten about by the government and promised help which never arrived, summed up by the lyrics "Can nobody save us, will anyone try?" This song highlights the devalu-



ing of human life, especially in the poorer states. 'Disparity by Design' incorporates the tempo and spirit of punk rock but every word is resonant with the inequalities in society. McIlrath sings: "In which access depends on who you know or where you came

from, whose daughter are you? Whose fortunate son?" 'Make It stop (September's Children)' confronts homophobia. Sadly, the song was influenced by a wave of suicides of young people who were bullied because of their sexuality. Chillingly it asks "too much blood has flown from the wrists of the children shamed for those they chose to kiss, who will rise to stop the blood?" The song also contains a positive message to those in this situation, "It's always darkest just before the dawn, so stay awake with me let's prove them wrong". The band's willingness to bring issues neglected by the mainstream media to their audience shows that McIlrath's claims of motivation are true. For Rise Against, the message is important.