

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.

Where was Unison?

Shropshire council has just sent out letters to all its 6,500 employees telling them that as from 30 September they will no longer have a job. However, they can return on 1 October if they accept a 5.4% pay cut together with changes to sickness and holiday entitlements. In the letter it states that if they do not accept these cuts then they will be dismissed.

Public sector union Unison, which has around 40% of the council workforce, is currently balloting over industrial action - let's just hope it's not a question of too little, too late? Public sector workers showed how strong and united they could be on 30 June, but where was the leadership of Unison?

Ruthie McNally

Worcester

See report page 4

Olympic bribery 'normal and legal'

The Olympics are a huge opportunity for the world's largest companies to increase their megaprofits. I work for BT. It proudly proclaims that it is an Olympic 'partner' and has tickets to give away as prizes in internal competitions. It is hard to imagine BT spending as much money as it has without the prospect of increased commercial exposure bringing profit at the end.

Many companies worry they could be breaking the new Bribery Act which came into force on 1 July if Olympic tickets are given to prospective clients as part of negotiating a deal (if your attempt to get tickets failed, that's where they've ended up!).

Lawyers say that if firms have never entertained that particular prospective client before, it might be construed as a bribe. But if it is a long standing customer it may be seen as continuing normal business practice and you won't hear the cell door banging behind you.

Not only is it considered normal (and legal) conducting business at a sporting event but clearly capitalism can't function without bribery and corruption.

Clive Walder,
Birmingham Socialist Party

Undermining the NHS

Sometimes you can work out what is going on in society just by looking around you. There are some large billboards near where I work. One of them now has a new poster.

It says "Waiting for an operation? Special price operations from your BMI private hospital in Droitwich. Including hip replacement, knee replacement, posteriodisc prolapse, cataract, inguinal hernia, varicose veins". The phone number and email address are given.

The "special price" is particularly interesting, what next "two for the price of one"?

Clearly, firms like this do not invest unless they see a potential profit, and they can see that because their business partners in the Con-Dem government want to put them in position to undermine the NHS.

Pete, Worcester

Reactionary role of press

The mainstream media has played a thoroughly reactionary role in the history of class struggle. Consider their role in attacking the miners, the nationalised industries, the poll tax rebels, the 1980s Liverpool council and, more recently, in cheering for the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Breaking the ruling class's power to control, dominate and influence the mainstream press would be a major step forward for the working class as a whole, enabling open mass access to accurate reporting of events of genuine concern to ordinary people.

The party should openly discuss and debate our policy on the media. As a concrete outcome of this debate, a campaign should be established putting forward a clear programme for radically reorganising Britain's media to the advantage of the working - rather than ruling - class. If there was ever a time for such change, then now is that time!

James Naish,
Manchester

Socialists must build their own media!

None of the commercially run press has ever sided with the working class in struggle. Whatever the sympathies of individual journalists, they are part of a system. Even books by authors like George Orwell were "edited" to filter out critical comment - the section in his introduction to *Animal Farm* which compared undemocratic practices in Britain with the Soviet Union was not printed.

Orwell commented that most of Britain's press is "owned by wealthy men who have every motive to be dishonest on certain important topics. But the same kind of veiled censorship also operates in books and periodicals... plays, films and radio. At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question."

"It is not exactly forbidden to say this, that or the other, but it is 'not done' to say it.... Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness. A genuinely unfashionable opinion is almost never given a fair hearing, either in the popular press or highbrow periodicals". Socialists must campaign against the lies and manipulation of the media tycoons. The best way to do that is to build their own media - in print and online.

Sue Powell

UK Les Miserables

I believe that the time is ripe for the people in this country to get out on the streets and protest at these continuing cuts. As long as we sit back and accept them we will end up with David Cameron and the rest of the obscene rich ruining this country. We are one of the richest countries in the world. It is time to get Cameron out, along with all his other Eton cronies. It is a disgrace that we have poverty at this level in the UK in the 21st century. It is time we staged our own "Les Miserables".

Tish Jarvis

Theatre review

From a Spark to a Flame



The Tolpuddle story still inspires trade unionists nearly 180 years later photo Paul Mattsson

James Ivens

The Tolpuddle Martyrs story is one of enduring importance, especially in times like these. *From a Spark to a Flame* is a production dealing with the six farm labourers who, in 1832, dared to organise what we would now call a trade union, in order to better their pitiful lot.

The sale of grazing areas to wealthy capitalists meant ordinary men and women, used to sustaining themselves on public land, were forced to sell their labour power to landowners to survive. The cost of supporting a family was then 13 shillings a week. The efficiency of new machinery encouraged farm owners to cut wages to nine, seven, and eventually six shillings a week.

Agricultural workers were united by their struggle, forming a 'friendly society' to bargain pay collectively. The leaders faced mass persecution by landowners and judges, leading to their eventual deportation to Australia.

On 25 June this year, *From a Spark to a Flame* was performed to a full house at TUC Congress House. The

performance was organised by Ser-tuc Theatre Club, an organisation that puts on plays of interest to working people. The Theatre Club aims to charge nothing for admission. This free production of *From a Spark to a Flame* was produced in association with local branches of youth drama company Theatretrain.

That day, the performers hailed from Basildon, Braintree, Colchester, Harlow, and Hertford branches of the company in the latest revival of a production that began life in 2002.

Created by Theatretrain's musical director, Robert Hyman, *From a Spark to a Flame* first played at London's Old Vic and went on to show at the annual Tolpuddle festival in Dorset.

These are two very different sorts of performance spaces, and Congress House conference hall is yet another. It shows the strength of the ensemble and the power of the story that the production can suit any space.

The Theatretrain branches flood the stage with a host of colourful characters as the story requires. Actors are backed by the rest of the

ensemble in a swelling choir that invokes a spirit of mass, collective unity.

Actors on stage are even voiced by doubles in the choir. This bold choice by the directors gives the show a larger-than-life quality that fits the heroes and villains it is concerned with. A guiding narrator tells the story's key details while the ensemble gives life to the events through a series of scenes and musical numbers.

This hour long show follows the martyrs from their starveling beginnings, through their glorious victory, to the final emigration of five of the men to Canada. The performers' commitment was clear, particularly enjoyable was the obvious glee actors took in their portrayal of the dastardly capitalist villains!

This powerful tale of hope and collective victory is needed now more than ever, as a reminder that the Coalition's attacks on the lives of working people can be beaten through united action.

A must-see for anyone at this year's Tolpuddle Festival, from 15 to 17 July, where the production will be shown again.



On Plymouth's 'Festival of Diversity' photo Plymouth SP

On 9 July, the divisive, far-right English Defence League (EDL) planned to 'invade' several towns and cities to hold marches. Socialist Party members were part of the mass opposition that attempted to mobilise against the EDL's poisonous ideas. In Plymouth the Trades Council, which comprises local trade union branches, organised a 'festival of diversity' that attracted 500 people.

The Socialist Party marched under the slogan: "Jobs, homes and services not racism!" We aimed to show to the people of Plymouth that there is a real socialist alternative to the far-right politics of hatred.

In Halifax, where the EDL also 'invaded', socialists stood firm in arguing with EDL members who tried to accost them and managed at least to make some of the marchers consider what they were saying.

Unemployment, poverty, lack of decent social housing and the harsh effects of savage Con-Dem cuts to jobs and services are the breeding ground for people to be targeted by the racist EDL. The Socialist Party campaigns for policies of job creation, house building and investment in public services and aims to build a real socialist alternative.