

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.

Big society, big issue

Walk down any high street in Britain and you'll meet a homeless person selling the Big Issue. If you want a living indictment of the kind of society millionaires like Cameron defend, look no further. The current Big Issue is edited by David Cameron! John Bird, who set out wanting to help the homeless now has them forced to peddle disgusting Conservative Party propaganda. If his name does not appear in the New Year's honours list - there just ain't no justice! In an editorial Bird lavishes praise on "the big society" where individuals can take the place of the state in helping out. Yet his magazine shows what's wrong with this approach. The homeless are at the mercy of the whims of a philanthropist. If those whims include grovelling to the Tories then the homeless have to grovel. Refuse to sell the magazine and you don't eat tonight. And one final question. If Cameron or Bird go into hospital will they be happy for a volunteer to walk in off the street and operate on them? If so I am prepared to give it a go. Where's my scalpel?

Derek McMillan

Free Tommy Sheridan

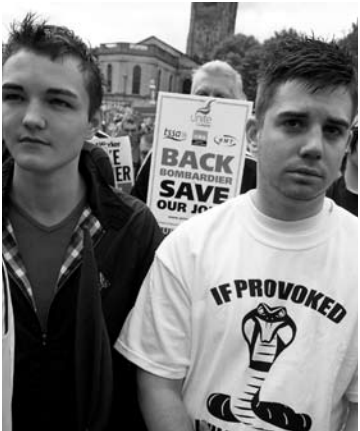


The Murdoch phone-hacking scandal provoked the obligatory hand-wringing from politicians, who were in bed with the Murdoch empire until very recently. The inquiries, initiated to deal with public outrage, have one objective - preserving the capitalist system while serving up some sacrificial lambs from the Murdoch-police-political establishment circle. The Socialist Party can do something to disturb the capitalists' plans - bring the plight of Scottish socialist Tommy Sheridan to the fore. The joint campaign by the police, News International and the political establishment to bring Tommy down is a microcosm of the corruption at the heart of public life. As a first step why not organise a march to the prison where Tommy is held (now Castle Huntly, near Dundee - Eds)? That can help begin a vigorous, working class campaign to free Tommy and in the process do enormous damage to the credibility of the political order.

Rob Rooney
Plymouth Socialist Party.

Dangerous road

Union leader Tony Woodley called at the recent Bombardier support rally, as Gordon Brown did before him, for "British jobs for British workers"! Union leaders should definitely not go down this dangerous nationalist road. Now is the time for maximum workers' unity to fight big business attacks on public services and living standards. There is plenty of work to be done in the UK (and around the world). Does everyone have somewhere to live? Is every class size 20? (or ten?). Are free nurseries for children found in every communi-



ty? Are hospital places abundant in your town? Is every road repaired? Can every young person find sports halls and challenging, enjoyable recreation? The only work big business sees is that which turns a profit. Not the same thing at all as the work needed for a better place for all to live!

Steve Appleton

Offshore robbery

What about getting the UK back on its feet by employing more tax inspectors to claim the billions back from the offshore accounts of the super-rich? And the trillion pounds of our money back from the bankers? What about hitting the Tory businesses where it hurts - in their pockets?

A Nottinghamshire socialist

Don't let Letwin win

Tory minister Oliver Letwin says that public sector workers need 'fear of job loss and real discipline.' A Cabinet Officer spokesperson also complained about 'productivity in public services'. But we already face 'fear of job loss' and management regimes that sometimes resemble tin-pot dictatorships. Workers we represent at Coventry city council face the threat of losing their jobs, doing vastly more work because colleagues have been sacked and not been replaced, plus pay freezes (real term pay cuts) and attacks on our pensions.



We deal with some of our city's most vulnerable people, and cannot provide the services they need. Our job, providing high quality public services to Coventry, is threatened and undermined by coalition cuts being implemented by the Labour council. The biggest cause of sickness at the council is stress, no doubt caused by this situation. Morale is low, and to paraphrase Blackpool FC's manager Ian Holloway, some of our members 'are so low they could walk under a closed door while wearing a top hat'. Nothing would slap this government down more than coordinated action between all public sector unions at the earliest opportunity in the autumn.

A Unison steward
Coventry

Readers' comments
Spain: "Throwing a shoe at the system"

"The indignados don't take holidays", commented one newspaper. "Instead they came in their tens of thousands from all over Spain to turn the heat up on an already sweltering capital. Spanish daily El Pais remarked that the indignados (indignant ones) had retaken Puerta del Sol in Madrid and revived the spirit of the recent movement.

Singing, dancing and chanting "Madrenazu al sistema", throw a shoe at the system, (a reference to the Iraqi journalist who confronted George Bush), four marches converged on the Sol. The area was a sea of protesters; you literally had to go with the flow.

The mood was euphoric, a glimpse of the tenacity and power of this movement and a reminder that hatred and defiance of the system has not eased up. If determination to end the rule of the bankers and corrupt politicians was sufficient, capitalism would be hanging by a thread in Spain.

But for all the movement's merits, spontaneity and impact, it is still grappling with how to bring about the desired change. The destina-



Indignados occupied Spanish squares photo Sarah Wrack

tion is outlined but the travel plan is sketchy.

I travelled on a coach from Asturias. During a break Pedro, a Marxist, approached me. We discussed all manner of topics from the Spanish civil war, Liverpool city council and the current industrial battles in my home town, Southampton.

When the coach restarted spontaneous cheers erupted from the back and people started to chant

my name! Pedro had translated our conversation and it had met with approval.

I was then asked to address the coach via the public address system and again it was punctuated with cheers in places. There was a real openness to new ideas, particularly those that outlined a clear coherent strategy to develop the movement.

Gavin Marsh
Madrid and Asturias

"It's a modern form of slavery"

A Turkish citizen who came to the UK six years ago as a student, then couldn't go back to his country for political reasons, told the Socialist about the exploitation of illegal workers.

There are estimated to be 1.7 million illegal workers in the UK. They work in 17th to 18th century conditions: long hours (13-14 hours a day) and low-paid.

"The government are hypocrites. They support the exploitation of Chinese workers in China and exploit them here too. Many immigrant workers here work in conditions that no one should put up with.

"It's a modern form of slavery.

They have no rights, no health care, no housing. They live in very bad conditions. A friend had to sleep for months in an alley behind the takeaway shop where he worked.

"Tory minister Iain Duncan Smith says employers should give jobs to British workers, but no one wants to work on low pay in bad conditions from 4pm until 5am, often getting abuse from drunken customers. Many Chinese, Bangladeshi, Thai, Turkish and other workers face this in the takeaway food industry, but they have no choice.

"The government closes its eyes for years to the exploitation going on. The government sent armed

forces to Libya for oil but lied to the public that they were there for human rights.

"They exploit people, break human rights, close their eyes to slavery in Britain and attack another country for 'human rights' reasons. Even kids wouldn't believe you. Your government is there just for oil.

"We need swift action. Stop exploiting people immediately. These workers should be given the right to work legally, pay tax, receive health care and get their human rights. The trade union movement should take up this issue and campaign for decent jobs with decent pay for all workers."

Play review:
Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

Bill Mullins

The south east region of the TUC and transport union RMT recently hosted a new interpretation of the famous play by Robert Tressell, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists.

The play, produced by Townsend Productions and Hertford Theatre and adapted by Stephen Lowe has a cast of just two, Fine Time Fontayne and Neil Gore. They play all the main characters in Tressell's original book.

For many people the book was their first introduction to socialist ideas and the new play keeps to its original message very well on the whole. Clearly, from the reception when I saw it, most of the audience were familiar with the book and its main characters, otherwise it could have been difficult to follow its drift.

In the play Frank Owen is the socialist who, around 1908, tries to

convince his fellow house painters in the fictional town of Mugsborough of the superiority of socialism over capitalism. He met with scepticism and jeering except for one character who agrees that they are being exploited and therefore need to stick together against the bosses who are driving down their wages.

Frank Owen is reluctant to do this and expresses the view that organising against the bosses in unions is playing the game that the capitalists want you to. "We should take over everything and not mess about with the edges," seems to be his message. Tressell himself was a member of the Social Democratic Federation which Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin critiqued in his pamphlet "Left-wing Communism: an infantile disorder".

However, the new interpretation does bring out very skilfully some of the key points in Tressell's original work such as the scene of the "great money trick" and the

discussion in the pub during "the annual beano" where the workers are brought out once a year to the countryside on a day trip.

The strength of the original book and previous stage productions (particularly the recent Radio Four play) was that Tressell exposed in graphic form the greediness of the bosses as they exploited the workers and the role of the bosses' agents.

The play is especially good with Hunter, the general foreman, who spends his times slinking about trying to catch the workers out who might be "slacking".

In this interpretation the two actors have to rapidly switch between characters (mainly by donning various hats on stage) while explaining to the audience what is going on. They do this well and were appreciated for their efforts.

The play is due at several venues in the coming months. For details see <http://www.townsendproductions.org.uk>