

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.

Human cost of cuts

Last Saturday I took a phone call at work from a woman who had just received notice of possible redundancy. She was told her post was being deleted and she would have to apply for a new post in a competitive interview.

This person has two jobs. Sobbing, she told me her job in the other council was also being deleted. She told me she couldn't get out of bed, her mother had been knocking at the door to see if she was OK but she couldn't answer. She sounded in a desperate place.

I phoned a mutual friend to ask them to help her on a personal level. As a union rep I carried this conversation with me through my working day, worrying constantly about her. Experiences like this make me so angry.

For me 30 November can't come soon enough. For some, like the 100,000 public sector workers who have already lost their jobs, it will be too late but for others it will give hope and confidence. Unlike 26 March when we showed the bosses our might in our own time, this will be on their time and the lesson won't be lost. All out on 30 November!

A public sector worker



brands this as "obscene" but Len McCluskey's solution is to give greater power to shareholders to curb directors' pay. Why isn't a trade union leader saying "what about the workers having that greater power?" Workers in these corporations could give you an accurate picture of how much use these directors are and whether they should be given house-room, let alone a salary.

It does however suggest a very simple solution to the pension crisis. Let pensioners award themselves a 50% increase - 'because we're worth it'!

Michael Dennis

Slackers?

One-man think tank Adrian Beecroft proposes to the government that employers should have the right to 'sack the slackers' as the Daily Telegraph impartially put it. Employers would not need any reason to sack you, if they think you're slacking then out you go. This is what happens in firms with no union but Beecroft imagines a world where this applies to everyone.

Beecroft certainly purchased the right to influence government policy, having paid £530,000 into Tory party funds. But where did he come by money like that? Mr B is a very kind man. If you're strapped for cash uncle Adrian will slip you £100. Of course everything has a price. In 30 days his boys will be collecting £136.72. Which magazine says this is an APR of 4394%.

And if any employee fails to put the screws on his victims? Well obviously a slacker so off they go!

Derek McMillan

Disgusted by councillors

I was totally disgusted with the response of Greenwich councillors towards the Blackheath Bluecoats school action group [Bluecoats is a local school threatened with closure].

I was in the gallery ready to ask questions regarding cuts at GSPlus, the council owned trading company and the appalling plans to transfer the Welfare Rights Service to this 'for profit' organisation.

When the children, parents and teachers came into the council chamber, I heard one child say: "It is just like parliament". They expected to at least have some debate about the proposals. This did not happen.

All this enthusiasm for democracy and hopes that their voices would be heard, were totally dismissed by the mayor, Jim Gillman. When their spokesperson, an ordinary parent with no other political axe to grind, who must have spent hours preparing her statement sat down, she and they were dismissed with a curt 'noted'.

Councillor Gillman and friends should be deeply ashamed of the example they gave to those young people. When people receive this lesson in so-called democracy, is it any wonder that the only option is to take to the streets?

This letter from Trish Browne, a retired council social worker, was written in Greenwich after attending a council meeting.

Review

Battle for Bexley Square

Salford Socialist Party member Paul Gerrard has produced a new pamphlet on Salford's 1931 'Battle for Bexley Square'. Clive Dunkley from Coventry East Socialist Party reviews the pamphlet, looking at the lessons which today's anti-cuts movement needs to absorb from this momentous event.

On 1 October 1931, 10,000 Salford people marched on the old Town Hall in Bexley Square demanding no cuts to unemployment benefit, free coal for the unemployed in the winter and free milk for children under five.

The march was organised by Salford branch of the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) in response to the council's plans to impose on working class people the cuts made by central government. The NUWM opposed all cuts and had clear demands, including 'Not a penny off pay' and 'Not a worker off benefit'.

As the march reached Chapel Street it was cordoned off. When organisers asked for a deputation to be let through to put their demands to Salford council, the protesters were attacked by mounted police and plain-clothes and uniformed police attacked the demonstrators with batons.

Battles today

The opening paragraph immediately links battles against cuts and mass unemployment in the 1930s with those today. "In 2011, as in 1931, the burden of the crisis in the bosses' system is being off-loaded onto working people by a coalition government pretending to act 'in the national interest'. Cuts in the level of benefits, public expenditure and public sector workers' jobs and pensions, closely parallel those applied in the Great Depression".

The marchers understood that there are no 'nice' or 'acceptable' cuts and there could be no trade-offs, cutting one job or service to 'save' another that was more deserving. This vital lesson for today's anti-cuts movement needs to be restated.



Bexley Square, Salford, 1931

Although today any partial victory against cuts should be welcomed, a total victory against all the cuts would take mass trade union action and the bringing down of the ConDem government. Of course Labour also intend to make cuts, only more slowly and therefore would provide no solution for working people. However the defeat of the coalition would bring huge confidence for further struggles.

This pamphlet shows those fighting the cuts today the importance of demands which cement unity, rather than appeal to one section eg the unemployed, or public sector workers, as against those in employment or in the private sector, hence the necessary demand at this stage for a 24-hour public sector strike.

This pamphlet shows what it means to defy the state, a government determined to drive down the living standards of the working class and local councils unwilling to stop them. It will be available at Social-



Fighting cuts today photo Paul Mattsson

ism 2011, £2 or £3 solidarity price, or from Paul Gerrard direct on 07999 951869 or pgerrard2001@yahoo.co.uk (£3 will cover postage).

BBC gags pensioners

Last week was pensioners' campaign week, highlighting basic rights in retirement: The right to a basic state pension, set at £178 per week, to take pensioners out of poverty in old age. The right to be cared for with dignity in the community or on the NHS. The right to a warm home with a winter fuel allowance of £500 a household.

Between December and March, 25,400 pensioners died in England and Wales of cold-related illnesses. And the government's response is to cut fuel allowances.

But you won't hear much about this on the BBC as pensioners are barred from appearing on the BBC's Question Time programme panel! We've been trying to get pensioners' leader Dot Gibson on the programme but the BBC says: "the bright lights and pressure would be too much for them"! Yet David Dimbleby, who presents the programme, is 73! Salford Pensioners' Association lobbied the BBC but their security removed our banners and told us to get off the square as it was private property. Protests continue and Unison activists intend to raise the issue shortly with retired members.

**George Tapp
Unite electricians, Salford
Pensioners' Association**

We're worth it

The government is 'not sure' it can afford the scheduled CPI-based increases to pensions - about 5%. However the bosses of major corporations received ten times that increase in remuneration. Apparently this is fair because they decide their own remuneration and think they're worth an average of £2.7 million a year.

The Unite union's leadership correctly

TV review

The World's Biggest Bomb

Channel 5, 27 October

Andy Ford

This documentary dealt with the nuclear arms race between the USA and the Stalinist USSR from the late 1940s, culminating in the USSR detonating the world's largest nuclear device in 1961.

Initially the US ruling class believed they could maintain exclusive knowledge and use of nuclear weapons. When the USSR also developed an atom bomb, US generals set off to develop an 'H-bomb' based on nuclear fusion rather than fission, as in the original 'A-bomb'.

Many corners were cut, rushing to develop an H-bomb to terrify the USSR. American scientists monitoring the 'Castle Bravo' H-bomb test in Bikini Atoll in 1954 nearly incinerated themselves when the thermonuclear reaction ran out of control, developing a yield of 15 megatons rather than the expected five megatons.

The documentary recreated scientists in their concrete bunker feel-



ing first the incredible heat wave, then listening to the blast wave destroying everything above ground and making even the concrete shelter creak and shift. Most of the test's measuring instruments were vaporised. Bikini Atoll was contaminated and mass radiation sickness affected islands hundreds of miles away.

The USSR bureaucracy's response was a plan to build a 100 megaton bomb though they scaled it back to 'just' 50 megatons, realising the destruction that would be unleashed. Nevertheless, the 50 megaton bomb was detonated in the USSR's far north on 30 October 1961.

The blast was around 3,000 times as powerful as the Hiroshima bomb, and had ten times the force of all explosives used in world war two. The mushroom cloud was seven times higher than Everest and the blast broke windows 500 miles away.

The documentary explained the insanity of nuclear weapons and the arms race. It showed how a lot of the best scientific talent is wasted on devising weapons able to wipe out civilised life on earth.

These criminally irresponsible tests were conducted 50 years ago, but the ruling classes of both the USA and now capitalist Russia still retain these sorts of weapons to threaten and bully other nations in pursuit of their interests.