

the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

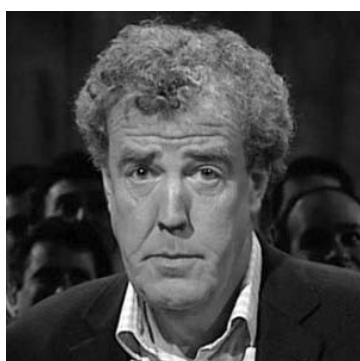
Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbag, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, or phone 020 8988 8771, email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk. We reserve the right to shorten letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Big mouth...

Jeremy Clarkson's remarks on the One Show on 30 November were a disgrace. His bigoted comments were an attack on the working class. He is typical of the upper middle classes who are detached from reality. He is a man with a lot of influence and these remarks are very dangerous.

This isn't the first time he has made controversial remarks. Previously, he has made homophobic, sexist and racist comments. He should be sacked by the BBC immediately just for the later comments alone. I feel like boycotting the BBC until this self absorbed, opinionated idiot is fired.

Andrew Morgan, Nottingham

**Cuts and independence**

A friend on Facebook was talking recently to friends about cuts to services for deaf people. I sent her the link for The Hardest Hit campaign. This was her reply.

"All of us are trying to achieve what we want in life but the cuts are putting a barrier to it!"

All this has really got out of hand and I certainly would not like to rely on my mum to ring and do things on my behalf! Where does independence come into this?

I know someone who has learning difficulties and cannot do a lot of this by themselves. They are closing down the supported housing she's living in. Now the government wants her to go into personalisation (personal budgeting) but she has only been offered ten hours a week which is just disgraceful because she needs help with feeding, shopping etc and there's no way ten hours is enough!"

Nottinghamshire Socialist Party member

Angry ambulance workers

Within moments of David Cameron labelling the N30 day of action a 'damp squib' and saying 'ambulance services are working normally', the London Ambulance Service was forced to announce an internal major incident and had to call on the Met Police for help. An agreement was reached with the unions to answer life-threatening emergency calls, and calls that could develop into more serious conditions. However crews became angry at being asked to cover more routine and minor injury calls.

There was also an announcement that crews would not be paid pro rata (paid for each job they do) but that pay would be reduced by 50%. So as the day developed more crews decided to go on all-out strike.

For ambulance workers this day was not just about pensions. Morale is low. Suffocating internal policies undermine

judgement. The sickness policy is seen as intimidatory, with crews being tagged from the moment they sign on to the moment they sign off.

900 frontline job losses have also been announced, so an ever-increasing workload is passed onto an overstretched workforce. The day expressed real anger on many issues, not least the threat to the very existence of the NHS as we know it.

Steve Harbord, London Ambulance Service Unison rep, personal capacity

Not just pensions

The 2008 national Unison strike saw a turnout from my workplace of under 10%. This time it was 75%. The workforce now feel there is little left to lose. The bosses tell us that the writing is on the wall for our service – Warwickshire county council provision of day-care for adults with learning disabilities.

Unlike the last strike, I didn't hear anyone say striking is unfair to the customers. Rather, fear of what is in store for our customers convinced many to take action. But pensions can be less relevant to workers expecting redundancy. The union leadership should not be fighting just on this issue but also organising against the closure of our service.

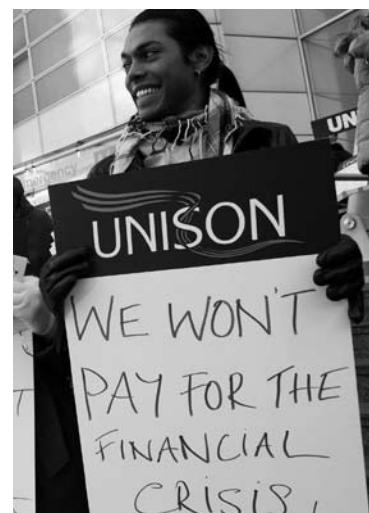
A Warwickshire Unison member

Blame the bankers

I was surprised how big the demo in Luton was on 30 November. 500 people marched through the town shouting "blame the bankers not us". A lot of people made the important point that private sector workers need decent pensions too.

At the rally at the end it was announced that the two local Labour MPs "couldn't make" the event. I think that says it all about the Labour Party now.

Keith Hussey

**Changing consciousness**

What a great show of strength on N30. And what a breath of fresh air to hear working class people say it as it is rather than overpaid politicians telling us why we are being made to pay for a crisis we didn't cause.

In Reading after the demo, walking to our cars, a man called us over and asked if we were to do with the strike. We first thought he was going to give us trouble but he handed us £25 and vanished. If that isn't public consciousness changing I don't know what is.

James Bibey, Bracknell

Theatre review Goodbye Barcelona

A musical to mark the 75th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War by KS Lewkowicz and Judith Johnson.

Tony Saunois

The idea of a musical commemorating the epic Spanish civil war (1936-39), and inspired by the heroism of the International Brigades may appear incongruous.

However, from the opening set in London's East End and the fight against Mosley's fascists, to the tragic ending as the heroic but defeated fighters who went to Spain, make their return journey to Britain, this is a vibrant, moving production.

It arouses the real spirit of internationalism that drew thousands of workers from many countries to sacrifice everything and rally to fight Spanish fascism. Portrayed through the eyes of Sammy and his mother Rebecca, the hopes and inspirations of the International Brigadistas are powerfully driven home by songs specially written for this production.

However, the reality of war - its hardships, suffering and sacrifices - are not absent. The assembling of the fighters, mainly drawn from working class families, is powerfully driven home during the opening numbers. "Dockers, miners and students", one of the early lines sung by the ensemble, leaves you in no doubt who fought.

Sammy, an 18 year old young socialist whose father was killed by the fascists in London joined up, lying about his age. He follows in his father's footsteps in a struggle to change society. The story unfolds through this lead character's youthful enthusiasm, doubts and renewed determination that what he is doing is right.

The political events during the Spanish revolution and differences between the various political trends which existed are hinted at but not developed. This is possibly the main weakness of this highly enjoyable and inspiring production.

To music the different political forces are mentioned. The Socialists (PSOE), the Communists, the CNT/FAI anarchists, POUM and Trotskyists are all mentioned but presented



The lively production is a credit to the actors and writers

simply as forces which were split among themselves.

The Stalinists' pernicious role is hinted at but not developed. Neither is the social revolution really touched on as it is in Ken Loach's film 'Land and Freedom'.

However, the heroic role of the revolutionary workers of the anarchist organisations is portrayed by the determined worker Ernesto, who falls in love with Sammy's mother who had followed in search of her son, signing up as a nurse.

The western capitalist powers' role in refusing to send arms to the anti-fascist forces is sharply attacked.

Ernesto and the cynical non-party member Jack are critical of Russia's role. Ernesto alone brings out what drove the Spanish workers and poor to revolt during the revolution.

Pilar, who Sammy meets, becoming his Spanish lover, is eventually driven to prostitution to try to pay for medical treatment for her daughter who tragically dies anyway. To find out who finally makes it home to London, go and see it.

What is lacking in political analysis of the different left-wing parties is compensated for in the portrayal of the sense of internationalism and

justification that all the sacrifice involved was worth it. The reality of the war, the hunger, the absence of arms and the sheer exhaustion at different stages of the battles they are involved in means that these fighters' experiences are not romanticised.

Sammy, Jack and the others all have their moments of doubt. But all - even at the end as they are defeated - boldly proclaim that given the opportunity they would do it again.

As Rebecca suggests maybe they should never have come. Ernesto powerfully replies: "Never say that - the Spanish people will never forget what you people did".

This lively, enthusing and innovative production is a credit to both actors and writers. The use of the anthem the 'Internationale' - with changed words to depict different stages of the war is extremely effective. This powerful commemoration to the thousands of ordinary workers who formed the International Brigades on the anniversary of the Spanish civil war should definitely be seen if possible.

Running until 23 December at the Arcola Theatre, Dalston London E8.

Brazilian socialists remember Socrates

The last day of the PSOL left party's congress in São Paulo was dedicated to the memory of the great Brazilian footballer Socrates, who died from liver disease on the same day.

The PSOL congress displayed a rare moment of unity as delegates and visitors remembered Socrates' life, not just as a brilliant football player but also as a champion for the rights of the working class and the downtrodden of Brazil.

And the downtrodden of São Paulo and the rest of Brazil desperately need such fighters. On the same day as he died his old São Paulo club, Corinthians, won the Brazilian league title to the delight of at least half of the city's football fans.

However, after the close of Congress, as delegates walked through the city's skyscrapers to the noise of the fireworks celebrations you see a darker side of São Paulo.

On almost every side street, hundreds of street people were setting up their cardboard beds for the night among the day's rubbish piles and the rats that infest them.

The old, the young, men and women who despite their miserable existence pose little threat to passers-by, are treated as human garbage. Their sunken eyes tell you they have given up all hope of ever having a decent life.

Brazilian capitalism wants to show the world a different image so by the light of day the streets are cleaned up to show a city that is more presentable for a country that will be hosting the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016.

The cash and the corruption that follows such projects are plentiful yet its downtrodden street people are treated worse than British animals!

Socrates was unique among the great Brazilian footballers because he had a genuine social conscience and a lifelong commitment to improve the conditions of the Brazilian working class.

It was possible for Socrates to have received a liver transplant but he refused to jump the queue, a further indication of the principles he



Socrates

held until he died.

LSR, the Brazilian section of the CWI socialist international, argued forcefully at the PSOL Congress for a socialist programme to eradicate the brutality of capitalism in Brazil and to build a new mass party of socialism. That is the best way to remember such a sporting hero as Socrates.

Alec Thraves, São Paulo