

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.

Fighting together

As a private sector worker and Unite union member, I marched through Liverpool on N30 with thousands of other working class people. Shoppers (and shop workers) cheered us. This was the true meaning of 'We're all in this together'. Workers took action to tell Cameron and Co 'this far and no further'.

We defeated the poll tax – and Thatcher – by organised non-payment and mass action. She thought she could take on the working class in one go. Now the Con-Dems are making the same mistake. We can defeat this government and push it out of office if we keep the pressure on the TUC to call further strikes.

We also told New Labour – this is a movement you won't control. How dare Miliband say that a strike means failure? This strike was a ringing success. New Labour politicians just wag their fingers at workers daring to defend our livelihoods. Clearly, trade unionists will have to stand in elections ourselves. Judging by the response on the Liverpool demo and from passing motorists on the Unilever pickets in Port Sunlight, there must be hundreds of thousands willing to join and vote for a genuine socialist party.

Chris Robinson

When's the next one?

It was excellent coverage of the 30 November strike in issue 697 of the Socialist, especially the detailed article by Hannah Sell.

I marched with my fellow trade unionists through Swansea city centre and we received overwhelming genuine warmth and applause from the public lining the route. This belies the Con-Dem propaganda that the strike did not have the support of many ordinary people. Right TUC, when is the next one?

Lin Black, Swansea

Green hypocrisy

Twenty thousand public sector workers supported the N30 strike in Gloucestershire. Up to 3,000 people attended a lunchtime rally. Gloucestershire county council though carried on with their scheduled meeting on the day. Labour councillors refused to cross the picket line. All others did cross, including the only Green Party councillor.

A Green Party member – who also gave a message of support at the rally – tried to justify the councillors' actions by claiming there were important issues being discussed and by not attending, Labour councillors were 'letting down' their constituents – none of whom were public sector workers of course! What hypocrisy from a party that has supported the anti-cuts struggle up to now.

John Ewers, Gloucester

Grinch in Greenwich

Greenwich council in south London has told staff at its new Woolwich Centre building that they can put up some Christmas decorations, but these must be taken down each night! Greenwich Unite believes that that the council does not think decorations are in keeping with the image it wants for the building. Meanwhile, Greenwich Service Plus, the council owned trading company, has issued compulsory redundancy notices to staff who deliver warm meals to housebound residents at the weekend. These staff earn, on average, £450 a month. Greenwich Unite branch secretary Onay Kasab said: "This employer appears more concerned about how a building looks than about the fate of service users or of low paid employees who will be wondering how they will manage on a cut in their income."

"Our union's members are even offering a pay cut, even on these measly wages, in order to save jobs. The council, with the £133 million it has in reserve, must engage with the unions to save jobs".

A Greenwich socialist

Say no to govspoke

Last week I attended a training course for a job. On the last day we were visited by a senior civil servant from the Cabinet Office, which is indirectly funding the project. He trotted out the usual Govspeak ie how the country had no money and that cuts were inevitable. I felt my temperature rising but held back until the end when I asked to make a point. I refuted the government's propaganda and mentioned the growing inequality and distribution of wealth. I added that any genuine 'community organising' would support communities in confronting this and win the resources required to enable everyone to realise their potential. This met with applause from most of the workshop participants.

I was approached by several people who told me they were socialists, including a bloke from Liverpool, who greeted me with a clenched fist salute after I talked about the battle of the city council in the 1980s.

Michael Green

Balance?

I do not expect much from Jeremy Clarkson but in his infamous interview he seems to have got everything wrong.



He said there had to be balance on the BBC, wrong again. I looked at the Daily Politics on BBC2 recently and there were two Tory MPs, Lib Dem Ming Campbell and ex-Sun editor Kelvin McKenzie around the table.

I thought they could have invited Norman Tebbit or Genghis Khan to add a bit of balance.

Pete, Worcester

Cameron's drugs problems



Cameron scores for the profit system

Paul Gerrard

David Cameron recently announced plans to fast-track new drugs, making them available to patients more quickly, and before they have completed clinical trials.

Then the Times let the cat out of the bag. They called it "allowing the companies that develop innovative medicines to profit from their discoveries more quickly". That sounded exactly like Cameron and Tory health minister Lansley.

Next day I read that "cures for killer diseases are at risk from cuts". Scientific breakthroughs with the poten-

tial to cure Parkinson's Disease, and provide vaccines for global killers such as HIV / Aids and malaria are at risk from cuts to university spending, especially Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Imperial College and University College London.

Cambridge is seen as the birthplace of molecular biology and is a leading facility in the search for a cure for Parkinson's.

We might think a university like Cambridge is rolling in money but they had a 70% cut in infrastructure funding this year.

They are spending £200 million to replace a 48 year old molecular biology lab and had to divert operational funding to their capital programme

to complete the project.

One academic warns that "this is not sustainable in the long term" and that "any further cuts would be extremely damaging to our ability to respond to future needs".

Cambridge has had £100 million from the government over the last three years but is due to receive only £45 million over the next three.

So Cameron wants to dole out untested drugs but on the other hand his cuts threaten to delay or prevent the development of new drugs. Is this confusion due to Cameron taking some drugs of his own or to defending a chaotic capitalist system dependent on profit?

Attacks on Tupe rights hit hard

Hannah Sell's article (issue 697) mentioned the Office of Budget Responsibility raised the ending of Tupe, the provisions that protect employees' pay, conditions and pensions if their jobs are privatised. I work with people with learning difficulties and challenging behaviours and was Tuped over from an NHS hospital to a so-called charity.

The company we transferred to now operates like a private company. It does not recognise unions but has an 'employers consultative committee'. I am on this talking shop. That has not stopped me building Unison but we have not yet got the 50% of the workforce needed for recognition.

Our firm wants to wipe out Tupe conditions by restructuring the company using an Economic Technical or Organisational (ETO) reason to do so. Most of its workers are on the firm's contracts so if workers do nights, overtime, bank holidays etc they only get the day rate. Many of us, but not the majority, are still in Tupe and get overtime, weekend enhancements etc.

After restructuring Tuped people will have to reapply for their own



Tupe provides no protection for workers photo Senan

jobs, which have only been changed slightly, provided they pass a test at an assessment centre! If they pass they are offered new jobs on new contracts with all Tuped conditions gone. Some nurses will see their pay cut from £14 an hour to £8 as well.

What is happening to us now awaits others. However it seems some firms who tried ETO were defeated as they had a weak ETO reason. If any readers can offer some advice I would be grateful.

A Unison member

Building bosses and their blacklist

For years, many builders suspected that contractors operated a 'blacklist' of troublemakers to ensure they did not end up with any union activists on their sites. Most people thought that if this existed, it was a word of mouth network between sub-contractors.

However, last year the Information Commissioner's Office raided the offices of Consulting Association in the West Midlands and found an actual, handwritten blacklist with index cards on any builder suspected

of being a red/troublemaker.

The list of companies who paid £3,000 a pop to check any potential applicants against this list included; Kier, Macalpine. Balfour Beatty, Amec, Carillion, Skanska, Taylor Woodrow, Lovell, Laing, Mowlem, Wimpey, Wilmot Dixon, Costain and 29 others, just in construction.

I discovered I was on this blacklist too, and I've never been a builder, I can't even put up a shelf! I'm guilty by mere association with some builder friends.

Given the companies that subscribed to this secret, illegal list, it is quite worrying. My entry was amateurish with a private eye's account of my movements at an anti-National Front demo and three cuttings from the Socialist newspaper, and they still managed to file me as an SWP member!

So, I'm on a blacklist because I knew some builders and am a socialist. Where does it end? With you?

Dan Gillman