

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.

Landfill fit for heroes

Politicians always make a big issue of lauding heroes of the armed forces. They send better people than themselves off to die in foreign wars, then pontificate about how wonderful they are - usually while cutting their pensions and neglecting their medical treatment. The US military has gone one step further. Dover Air Force base in Delaware is the main point of entry for the nation's war dead. Between 2003 through 2008 they now admit they dumped the remains of troops in a local landfill after cremation.

The officials say relatives of the fallen service members had approved some manner of disposal. Family members of the deceased troops, however, were reportedly not notified of exactly how their loved ones' remains were disposed of. The base is now the subject of a federal investigation for gross mismanagement.

They admit 273 troops were disposed of in this way. Military policy or regulations did not formally authorise the practice. The mortuary has handled the remains of more than 6,300 troops since 2001. They think it would take far too long to find out if their figure of 273 was more than a rough guess.

**Derek McMillan, Mid Sussex
Socialist Party**

Olympic cleaning

A letter from Waltham Forest council entitled '2012 Olympics - Dressing the Borough' informs residents who live near the Olympic park that they are required to make the front of their house attractive in case visitors see it. They offer up to £1,000 for residents/landlords that meet the criteria but you have to do the work first. If the work is not done to the council's satisfaction you will not get the grant.

How many people in these austere times can find the money to carry this work out? The letter makes it quite clear that if this is not carried out by the owner it will be done by the council and the owner charged.

When the Olympic bid was first given to London we were told that local residents in boroughs around the park would get benefits - all we have seen in Leyton so far is a few new paving stones and now this.

The letter says "we want our residents to have lasting benefits". Well, the lasting benefits I want are decent housing, a library service suitable for residents' needs, proper schools for local kids, proper Social Services for those who need them and for there to be no more job losses.

Brian Blake

Straw poll

photo Paul Mattsson

I've done something of a straw poll of Unison members who took action on N30 in my workplace. Of around ten members, everyone was opposed or at least, very concerned, about the proposed agreement on pensions. All were

willing to take further action and more than one thought it should be for a longer period to demonstrate our strength. Nobody is in favour of accepting a deal which leaves any of our members paying more in, working longer and getting less out.

Unison member, Swansea

Dear deer

BBC breakfast news told us that venison is getting more popular. Well, at £20 a kilo it isn't going to be in my oven. I find it strange at these times of cut-backs, unemployment and food banks that expensive cuts of meat are selling very well.

I am lucky because for my Christmas dinner I could eat a few slices of turkey from my local butcher, but many families across the UK were struggling to afford much food this Christmas, yet the top restaurants are full to bursting. It goes to show there's LOADS of money for the ruling class. When Mr Cameron said "We're all in this together", I didn't realise he meant our meat would be more dear.

**Darren Gibson,
Brighouse**

Lib Dem attacks

Swansea's Lib Dem-led local authority has followed the lead of Welsh Labour authorities, such as Rhondda Cynon Taff, and issued 188 notices over changes in terms and conditions - 90 days' notice of changes to terms and conditions, including doing away with shift allowances, reduced mileage rates and reduced overtime rates.

At my Unison branch stewards meeting, it was said that Labour winning the council elections in May would make no difference because the leader of the Labour group on the council is alleged to have had meetings with local authority officers about implementing the same cuts.

This emerged a week after he had marched with local authority workers on N30. If this is true then the hypocrisy of Labour should be exposed by the local authority union branches to ensure none of their members vote Labour in May. Whether it is Labour cuts or Lib Dem ones makes little difference. Swansea needs a strong anti-cuts challenge on a no cuts platform.

Ronnie Job

Sick suggestion

I've just read this and I'm currently picking up my jaw from the ground: "In November, Macmillan Cancer Support launched a petition against a government proposal to axe benefits for chemotherapy patients who cannot prove they are unfit to work."

So you feel sick as a dog, vomiting, hair falling out and mental anguish and they still expect you to be available for (non existent) work! It's unbelievable!

Sue Powell

We're not scroungers!

Ian Pattison - a marcher on the Youth Fight for Jobs Jarrow march - replies to Labour leader Ed Miliband's recent comments which claim to offer a 'radical rethink' on benefits.



photo Paul Mattsson

Dear Ed Miliband

I was disgusted to wake up to 2012 to hear that you're going to "get tough on the workshy." I'm a Master's graduate, but after four months out of work, and over 50 job applications, I've only just found a job.

Statements like yours prove that pampered politicians are out of touch. You have no idea what life is like for ordinary working and middle class people. For one job, I was one of over a hundred applicants. 2.64 million people (over a million 16-24 years olds) are chasing just half a million jobs.

No matter how much you condemn so-called benefit scroungers, it makes no difference to the unemployment figures. There just aren't enough jobs out there. If you're under 25, unemployment benefit is £53 a week. This is not enough to live on.

The Tories' 'Work Academies,' and other schemes, (inspired by similar measures started under Labour) are forms of cheap slave labour, forcing people to work for their dole. These

programmes make the unemployment figures worse, as they take a job away from someone who should be paid a decent wage.

The only new policy you have come up with is to deny benefits to anybody who has never paid tax. I never paid tax, as I have not found permanent employment since I left university, similar to millions of young people leaving school, college, and university jobless. The only temporary job I've had paid so little I wasn't eligible to pay tax.

If this disastrous policy was implemented it would only worsen the present situation where the rich are getting richer while the poor get poorer.

The Labour Party should be fighting for the immediate reinstatement of EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance) and the scrapping of tuition fees.

Labour councils, elected to stand up against the Tories, should be implementing these policies now. The blame for unemployment doesn't lie with ordinary people struggling

to find work, but with big business which is currently hoarding £60 billion in banks, refusing to hire, and refusing to invest.

The Con-Dems' pro-cuts agenda is making unemployment worse. But the Labour Party is not a credible opposition. You've let the hated Tories take the lead in the polls!

Britain's three main political parties all want to make working and middle class people pay for the crisis caused by big business, bankers, and the rich. They all see youth unemployment as a price worth paying.

If the capitalist system can't afford decent jobs, then we need to fight to build a socialist society that can. No mass political party out there speaks for ordinary people, the main pro-big business parties are happy to exploit young people while condemning them in the right wing media.

We need a new mass workers' party that will stand for the '99%', a political party that demands the creation of decent jobs, education, and training for all.

USA: Occupy movement links with working class

The US 'Occupy' movement and its slogans, such as "We are the 99%", have reflected the huge anger at widening economic and social inequality at a time of recession. On 12 December 2011 the Occupy movement helped organised a successful shutdown of major US ports. Ramy Khalil, Kerry Finnan and Ty Moore from Socialist Alternative report.

Port terminals along the US's west coast were successfully shut down on 12 December to strike back against systematic police violence when police evicted occupations in cities nationwide.

The port shutdowns also showed solidarity with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), that is waging an historic struggle against multinational grain exporter EGT. This blockade marked a significant step forward, shifting the Occupy movement's strategy and tactics from symbolic occupations of central squares to actively shutting corporations down and cutting into their profits.

The port actions overcame the opposition of a vast array of opponents - city politicians, police, the corporate media, even the combative ILWU's more conservative national leaders. But the Occupy movement and rank-and-file workers were correct to go forward with the action, which substantially disrupted business at several ports, despite the de-

termined opposition of the richest 1%.

This daring action centred around Occupy Oakland, which is providing a more working-class, racially diverse, and militant face for the Occupy movement. Many rank-and-file longshore workers helped organise and participate in the action which was called in solidarity with the ILWU in Longview, a port town where the EGT multinational is attempting to break its legal contract with the powerful union.

In Oakland 500 protesters set up a picket line at the port. The ILWU later sent home 150 of its 200 members, which generated enthusiastic celebrations among picketers. Marches later in the day attracted 4,000 people that succeeded in shutting down the port's second shift.

In Seattle, a protest of 500 people grew to over 1,000 who successfully blockaded Terminals 5 and 18, chanting "Shut down the west coast! Hit'em where it hurts most!"

A rank-and file ILWU member in

Seattle commented that the labour and Occupy movements need to work together if either is to have any chance of breaking the control of the 1% over our economic and political structures.

The ports shutdown showed the source of the ruling class's power - their ownership and control of corporations and capital. It also showed the sources of the working class's power - our ability to refuse to work, our numbers, level of organisation, fighting spirit, and ideas. So it is very positive that the Occupy movement responded to police repression by moving toward strike action and building links with the powerful unions and the working class.

This action boosted the confidence and influence of rank-and-file activists within the ILWU, other unions, and the left within the Occupy movement. The emerging alliance between Occupy and rank-and-file labour union activists is a positive precedent for future community-labour struggles and strikes.