

the Socialist postbag

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Olympic 'showpiece'

Prime minister Cameron recently doubled the budget for the Olympic games opening ceremony. "It's money well spent," he blithely declared. "It's a great advertisement and if you think of the millions of pounds we are spending, it's probably worth between two and five billion of free publicity to our country" [read big business].

Now, I'm keen on an exciting opening ceremony but I'm not sure that shelling out an extra £40+ million on the super-deluxe option is money well spent. £40 million would contribute a lot to my area, on the edge of the Olympic Park. We're fed up with Cameron nagging us that "we're all in this together". Yet Cameron will be in the stadium to watch the opening ceremony, but we'll be watching it on the TV, surrounded by collapsing public services.

The Olympic Games is a great sporting occasion which should be enjoyed by as many people as possible. But big business will get the benefits while we get the bill.

**Margaret Graham,
Walthamstow**

We won't pay...

British capitalism's leading figures seem to have given up trying to talk up the economy. Alan Budd of the Office for Budget Responsibility says British capitalism faces a "choice between extended misery if the euro survives and catastrophe if it doesn't."

And the pain will be multiplied tenfold for working class people. In the Financial Times, Ian McCafferty, from bosses' organisation the CBI, congratulates those union leaders who swallowed the rhetoric about preventing job losses by accepting cuts to pay and conditions.

But Kate Barker, a former member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, predicts that even if the British economy makes a paper recovery from new trouble by the end of 2012 - the most optimistic prediction - unemployment will rise in every quarter of the new year.

Now firms are blaming "over-employment" for low productivity and plan to shed jobs. The bosses are clearly planning to take everything from us. Fight every cut.

Ross Saunders



...for their crisis

The strike of 30 November can seem like a long time ago now, but the need to keep up the pressure only increases. 2012 looks like it's going to be grim. The economy and growth are weak. Con-Dem incompetence just makes life worse for ordinary people.

All this points to a complete failure of neoliberal capitalism. We are paying the price of a deregulated banking system created under Thatcher.

The fightback must continue. We must not pay for their crisis.

Graeme Kemp

Cuts hit disabled

Calder Valley Club in Calderdale, set up by local residents in 1981, has taken the devastating decision to make all its staff redundant after three groups offering respite day care for adults with physical disabilities were told to re-apply for their council contracts.

The charity had to dig into its own reserves, costing £44,000 so far, which is unsustainable. Calderdale council claimed the club does not wish to continue running the service after January, but a club trustee stressed that the charity's primary aim was to do just that.



The management committee comprising elected attending members and volunteers released a statement saying: "Cost-saving suggestions put forward by the council would reduce the service below an acceptable level ... many of our loyal staff and clients have been let down at very short notice." One cost-cutting suggestion was to offer a sandwich for lunch instead of a warm meal. After January there will not be an equal service available to Calderdale's physically disabled. Social workers are left to visit clients and try to mix and match a patched up service.

**Darren Gibson
Brighouse**

BNP expenses cheat

Rotherham councillor John Gamble of the racist British National Party has been "automatically disqualified from membership of [Rotherham] council" for missing meetings and claiming expenses. The local press says John Gamble "received £25,000 over 26 months" during which he only attended three meetings.

Gamble has drifted in and out of different right-wing parties, defecting first to the England First Party in 2009, then joining the National Front - who Gamble considered a 'more active' group - in 2010. However Gamble left the NF within weeks. In a press interview, confronted with NF policies, he commented: "You have caught me somewhat flat-footed... I am not aware of the severity of these opinions."

This story shows the nature and calibre of BNP candidates, but the far right in South Yorkshire is still a danger: At recent cross-union organising meetings for N30, there were warnings that the EDL had claimed all union activity 'fair game'.

But this disqualification is welcome. Furthermore, it proves that these right-wing groups are supporters of the current class system, and use imperialism, racism and fear to make money, and are in no way an alternative.

Chris Bingham

Film review

The Iron Lady in meltdown

Derek McMillan reviews the film *The Iron Lady*

The widely hyped film is not intended to cover all the political events of Thatcher's life. It deals with the political issues through the incoherent rambling recollections of an old and demented Thatcher after the meltdown of the 'iron lady'.

Of course a first-class actor like Meryl Streep can make the most unpromising of villains appear to have a sympathetic side. As well as eliciting sympathy for Thatcher's declining years and mental instability, she also portrays her as a "woman in a man's world" striking a blow for women!

However there are many women - miners' wives, Argentine widows of war, the millions who stood up against the poll tax (and I could go on!) - who are not at all sure Thatcher was a crusader for women's rights. It is their story which is excluded here. She was a crusader for Margaret Hilda Thatcher. And if that meant trampling on men or women she was indifferent.

And what about Thatcher's less likeable abiding hatred of the working class - the miners, the poll tax protesters and practically the whole city of Liverpool? That seems to have remained on the cutting room floor. She once told a friend only to hire

Hollywood gloss

The *Iron Lady* glosses over the brutality of Thatcher and her wealthy, capitalist government. Some members of today's coalition may hope that the film shows Thatcher - and hence her Tory successors - as heroic figures. The first signs are not positive for the Thatcher brigade.

The Guardian did a straw poll asking its readers to say whether they admired the real Iron Lady, only 12.1% said yes and 87.9% said no. Admittedly they would have got a more sympathetic hearing from the likes of the Daily Mail but any attempt to make Thatcher into a latter-day saint and feminist icon will be laughed out of court.



Thatcher, as seen by Militant in the 1980s cartoon Alan Hardman

a servant "who had patches on the knees of his trousers." Thatcher liked the working classes well enough, in their place - down on their knees!

And another area missing from the film - apart from the political omissions whose name is legion - is Thatcher's use of racism for electoral advantage. Echoing Enoch Powell she ranted about Britain being 'swamped by people of a different culture'. That is on the cutting room floor too.

Jim Broadbent's comic relief as the ghost of Denis Thatcher is a masterpiece. The only thing missing is the other side of this apparently jovial buffoon. Denis Thatcher made sure his Downing Street connection ensured that his business interests came to no harm - on one occasion complaining to Nicholas Edwards, the Secretary of State for Wales using Downing Street notepaper just to underline the connection.

One thing Meryl Streep did get off pat was Thatcher's style of delivery - one which makes sure nobody gets a word in edgeways. This applied

most of all to her cabinet colleagues or "bastards" as she used to call them. And there is a chilling sense in the scenes of the Falklands conflict, when Thatcher orders the sinking of the Belgrano, that this was a woman with a finger on the nuclear trigger. It is a wonder any of us lived to tell the tale.

Thatcher is famous but her claim to fame is that she led one of the most hated governments of all time, certainly of the post-war period. Even that dubious honour is likely to be taken away from her by the Con-Dem coalition.

The film intercuts her 1979 quotation from St Francis of Assisi: "Where there is discord may we bring harmony" with scenes from the miners' strike and the anti-poll tax movement showing Thatcher's carte blanche to the police to use force.

That is as good as it gets for an obituary of a figure who came to symbolise the Conservatives' heartless attitude. They don't talk about class war. They are too busy waging it.

21st Century payday Shylocks

Michael Davis

Shylock - Shakespeare's caricature of a moneylender demanding his pound of flesh - has nothing on today's payday loan sharks. Interest rates of up to 5,000% APR have been quoted for these philanthropic 'uncles' who help the poor make ends meet.

Even the more modest of them are charging 1,800% - the sort of figure that would have had Shylock's eyes watering.

And if the poor can't pay, never mind, these kind people will roll over their victim's debts adding interest to interest and so keep them in chronic debt. Shelter estimates that many could lose the homes they are desperately trying to hold on to.

A YouGov survey for Shelter in



Now working at Wonga

December 2011 asked 4,014 people in Great Britain if they had used payday loans, unauthorised overdraft, other loan or credit cards to help pay their rent or mortgage in the last 12 months.

One in seven respondents (15%) who took part said yes, representing a national figure of almost seven million people, with almost one million people using payday loans.

But have no fear, the government are going to "look into it." Don't hold your breath, they are still "looking into" the banks.

Britain's working class faces intolerable conditions but Labour's milk-and-water opposition are quite prepared to tolerate them. From inside their cosy bubble of padded expense accounts it probably looks quite rosy. A party of the working class would not put up with this.