

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.

Costa Concordia

While the media has concentrated on the alleged cowardice and incompetence of the captain of the ill-fated cruise ship, Costa Concordia, few have questioned the design of these giant liners.

However, the maritime trade union, Nautilus International, has pointed to the fact that within 45 minutes of being holed the ship was listing at too steep an angle for lifeboats to be launched. But it is possible to design watertight compartments so that these top heavy cruise ships remain stable for longer, with more hull beneath the water, and by incorporating rebalancing pumps. Currently these ships have a shallow draught to allow easier passenger disembarkation. The 13-storey Concordia, for example, only had eight metres of its hull underwater.

However, the need to maximise profits in a multibillion pound industry is likely to mean that shipping companies will oppose significant changes.

Simon Carter,
East London

Miliband's welfare u-turn

Ed Miliband has made it clear how the Labour Party's "Tory Plan B" on welfare reform will proceed if he gets to Downing Street. Miliband wants to shrug off his party's soft image on so-called "scroungers on the dole," with a u-turn.

With unemployment now nearing three million you'd expect a modicum of understanding, but no. Labour's shadow welfare spokesman Liam Byrne wants to mark the 70th anniversary of the Beveridge Report with an insult for those whom it was created to give some basic protection - the poor, unemployed and disabled workers. Byrne believes there is a new giant evil of dependency on benefits, a falsehood that he expressed boastfully in the Tory Mail on Sunday! Instead of attacking the poorest, it is a pity Byrne didn't pick up on the billions of pounds stolen from the exchequer every year through tax evasion by the multi-millionaires and billionaires in Britain.

Ian Reynolds, Leicester

Yachting parasites

The proposal to build a new royal yacht has rightly angered many at a time of great hardship and suffering. It shows the utter contempt that the Con-Dem government has towards us, rewarding not just the 1% but also one parasitical family, while destroying the families and livelihoods of the 99%.

The anti-cuts movement and republicans must work together to say that not only is the monarchy a completely undemocratic and corrupt 'institution', it is also unaffordable. With yacht-gate and the Jubilee just months away, the question about why we are spending so much, to keep one of the richest families in the world in their position, needs to become a central question.

Phil Wilson

Greece's future

In a short article on its website, a columnist for the Economist magazine spelt out just what Greece's future holds under capitalism:

"Greece's debt is a complex issue. Clearly, it must default to get its debt-to-GDP ratio down. But it also has a competitiveness problem that requires either a devaluation (not possible within the euro) or a fall in its costs (lower wages and thus a lower standard of living)."

In other words pain, followed by more pain, through cuts to living standards enforced in one way or another. Capitalism only has one potential solution to its crisis, to make ordinary workers suffer, not just now but for years on end.

Iain Dalton, Leeds

BT workers' Olympic opportunity

In 2010, members of the telecoms section of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) in BT were sold a pay deal. It provided for a 3% rise in 2010 and the following two years and for negotiations to be re-opened if inflation was either lower than 2.5% or higher than 3.2%.

In November 2011 inflation was 5.2% so the CWU approached BT to reopen talks. The company met the union and has said that they can't afford any more than the 3% originally provided for in the original settlement.

Socialist Party members in the CWU warned of the dangers of accepting a three year deal and are not surprised that BT are trying to renege on the agreement. BT offered a deal until 2013 to remove the prospect of any industrial unrest disrupting television coverage of this year's Olympic Games. That coverage won't happen without BT's highly skilled broadcast service engineers.

That gives the union a very strong bargaining chip. The question is whether the CWU telecoms leadership has the bottle to take the company on.

Clive Walder, CWU Birmingham, Black Country and Worcester branch, personal capacity

Homophobia splitting Tories

The deeply homophobic Tory right-wing is reportedly planning a major backbench rebellion against Cameron's proposal to give gay and lesbian couples the choice to have the same legal rights as married heterosexual couples. The Lib Dems are likely to back Cameron over the issue. Such a scenario was predicted at the Socialism 2011 LGBT rights commission last November. The Socialist Party supports equal rights for same-sex couples, whether they wish to marry or not.

We also, however, welcome the weakening of a party which is homophobic, sexist and anti-working-class. Homophobia is often used by the capitalist class to divide working people. In this instance homophobia is acting to divide a capitalist government.

LGBT reforms in themselves do not solve the problems of homophobia and transphobia, because such prejudices are tools of the capitalist class.

If same-sex marriage legislation proves a stumbling block for the Tories, most LGBTQ people will be happy to see them stumble.

Dave Younger

No iron lady

I would like to make a few points about the new movie, the so-called Iron Lady. The annoying thing about the mythologising of banal, mediocre orators like Thatcher is that it awards them a certain ability and talent that they do not possess. It creates a myth that these numbskull thinkers are acutely innovators and people of remarkable talent.



Thatcher's success, her jewel in the crown if you like, was Neil Kinnock and the right-wing trade union leaders who did their utmost to isolate the miners when they went on strike. After that Kinnock is most famous for expelling Militant councillors in Liverpool for standing up against Thatcher's attacks.

Thatcher was no Iron Lady. Militant showed that when they got rid of her with the poll tax. The support of Kinnock and the TUC kept her in power.

Lenin is famous for saying that capitalism would not last six weeks in Britain if it wasn't for the support of the trade union leaders. The same was true of the so-called iron lady of the 1980s, a real human tragedy that need not have happened.

David Miller

Capital gains

The mud slinging contest between Republican US presidential hopefuls Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney over who pays their 'fair share' of taxes is an amusing sideshow.

However, the personal wealth of these right-wing free market ideologues must serve as an eye-opener for hard-pressed working class Americans whose real incomes have not risen in decades.

Romney with his investment based \$200 million personal fortune 'earned' \$45 million in the past two years - putting him into the top 1% of income earners - but only paid 15% in taxes, a percentage less than most US workers. Romney's firm, Bain Capital, according to the Guardian, "made large profits by throwing people out of work". But rival candidate Newt Gingrich is no slouch when it comes to raking in the cash. His consultancy fees to the government bailed out mortgage provider, Freddie Mac, amounted to \$1.7 million. \$1.7 million is also the income which the Democratic president Obama and his wife earned in 2010.

Clearly, the need for a mass workers' party in the USA is long overdue.

George Brindle

Dear Tory MP...

Rob Bailey from Brighouse in Yorkshire was amazed and puzzled to receive a Christmas card from his Tory MP, Craig Whittaker. Below is an extract from Rob's reply.

Dear Craig,

Thank you very much for the card. I appreciate the sense of care and consideration a printed message can bring and it really has gone a long way to challenge my pre-conceptions about Conservative politicians being selfish and uninterested in the plight of the working man.

Unfortunately Christmas at my house was not a very merry time for several reasons. Firstly the VAT increase introduced by the instantly likable Mr Osborne at the beginning of the year left me with a £500 deficit in my household income. This is usually the amount I would spend over Christmas on presents, socialising with friends and family and treating myself to a bit of luxury food.

My parents are feeling the pinch a bit too. All this talk of increasing pension contributions for the public sector and shifting sick people off benefits has led to my mum and dad going into survival mode. Tins of baked beans are being stacked high and all non-essentials like Sky TV, central heating and the fridge freezer are being turned off and placed in storage.

I told them the best course of action would be to gamble all their savings on the roulette wheel. They could be millionaires! And at least in the event something goes horribly wrong they can apply for a public bailout.

My dad pointed out that that doesn't happen to people in the real world and that you had to be friends with a politician to get that kind of treatment. Hopefully this correspondence between the two of us could be my way in to the secret circle! In fact, if you could just run my stamp through your expenses and send me the money in the post that would be fantastic.

Thankfully my sister didn't come over so I didn't have to explain why there was no Little Mix CD under the tree for her. She was working most of the time set aside for family visits this Christmas as a glass collector in a bar.

It isn't exactly the career she planned for herself but with David Cameron using her EMA to pay for the mistakes of rich, white, middle aged men in the City it's the only way she can think to cover the costs of her education. Of course when she qualifies and becomes a highly paid, influential child minder I'm sure yourself (or whoever else is sat in your seat) will be more than willing to listen to her concerns.

The grandparents decided to follow the example of the humble field mouse and wait the winter out hibernating in a cardboard box full of ripped up newspapers. Since the energy companies privatised and became so very efficient (at raising prices) and their winter fuel allowance was used to keep the desert burning in Libya over the summer they feel it is their only option.

I will however show them your Christmas card in the hope it raises their morale and rekindles that old Blitz spirit buried deep inside them.

I was looking forward over the festive period to a visit from my girlfriend. Sadly she won't be able to get across from Manchester as rising train prices have made this mode of transport almost redundant for the minimum wage earner. I suppose I can take solace in the fact that 'we're all in this together'!

yours etc,
Rob Bailey

Apology

A reader has complained that the article '21st Century payday Shylocks' and the accompanying illustration in issue 700 of the Socialist are "inappropriate for a socialist newspaper" as it could give the idea that we accept anti-Semitism.

The editorial staff apologises for the choice of image.

The article's author explains that the point he was trying to

make was that Shakespeare's character Shylock's "insistence on his 'pound of flesh' is a familiar representation of money-lending which corresponds to the eye-watering rates of interest charged by the modern legal loan sharks."

The Socialist Party and its publications have a proud record of fighting racism and discrimination against minorities.

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine New February 2012 issue includes:

- **Dithering in Durban**
- **Pensions fight continues**
- **'The year of all risks'**

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