

Welfare 'reform' denies dignity - scrap it!

Ben Robinson

The Welfare Reform Bill (WRB) returned to parliament on Wednesday 1 February. The Saturday before, up to 200 protesters occupied London's Regent Street for nearly two hours, causing a huge tailback of traffic.

Wheelchair users chained themselves in between traffic lights, stopping the police from forcing the protest onto the pavement. When the police attempted to make announcements, they were shouted down by requests for a sign interpreter.

There was huge support from the passing public, especially as individuals explained how they would be affected by the removal of allowances, new assessment regimes and the cap on benefits.

But the acclaim was not universal. Basildon Tory councillor Luke Mackenzie caused huge outrage by stating on Twitter: "I hear there are a bunch of unwashed people at Oxford and Regent Street, if you don't like capitalism move to North Korea". This disgusting remark says a lot about the Conservatives' attitude to protesters and the disabled.

Mackenzie is not only a councillor; he works for Basildon MP Stephen Metcalfe, is assistant to the council leader and is on the Essex County Council NHS overview and scrutiny committee.

His dislike of protests can be judged by his record - he voted to evict the travellers at Dale Farm at an estimated cost of £18 million. This money would go a long way towards reducing the impact of some of the cuts, especially in London and the South East where they will hit hardest and Mackenzie is a councillor.

One of Saturday's protesters replied: "I washed today, but when PIP [personal independence payment] replaces DLA [disability living allowance] it will not acknowledge needing help to wash below the waist. What then?"

But it's not only the Conservatives who are backing the WRB. The Liberal Democrats do too, and Labour



photo Ben Robinson

leader Ed Miliband 'in principle' supports the £26,000 benefits cap per household which will push an estimated 67,000 families into poverty, only quibbling over minor details.

Unbelievably, shadow work and pensions minister Liam Byrne wrote to Nick Clegg to propose that, for most, the cap should be lower! Currently 54% of those households who will lose out are in London because of the high rents there. Inspired by Frank Field, the Labour Party is arguing for a benefits cap which is lower in other areas because the cost of living is lower.

Feckless Frank goes even further however, arguing that households with one person or a childless couple should have an even lower cap.

Labour thinks the benefits cap is popular and is attacking the coalition from the right in an attempt to

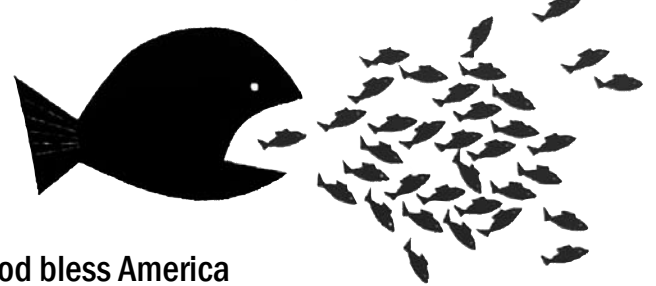
steal the limelight.

Saturday's demonstration showed the anger that exists among those who understand the impact the WRB is going to have. As more people realise what it means for them, their friends and their communities this vicious attack will be further challenged.

But the battle isn't over yet. Disabled People Against Cuts, who organised the protest together with UKUncut and others, calls for the complete scrapping of the WRB. Even if it passes through parliament, the pressure must be kept on. After all, the poll tax was made law before a mass movement led to its axing.

A national demonstration showing outright opposition would help to further publicise the impact of the WRB and add confidence to all those who will be affected.

Them...



God bless America

The United States of America - home to Wall Street, Hollywood and Disneyland; where dreams come true; capitalism at its best. Or not. Rapidly rising unemployment combined with wage freezes means that the average 25-64 year old American male earns about a quarter less than his 1969 equivalent. But, of course, we're in an economic crisis - when it's over and businesses have more money again, wages will surely go up...

And yet there doesn't seem to be much evidence of a crisis for big business - corporate profits in the US are higher (as a proportion of GDP) than at any time since the 1950s. And there is \$1.7 trillion sitting in the bank accounts of US companies rather than being invested - that would make a start on those wages, surely!

places. You can't call this perfectly legal activity 'corruption'. That would be like saying the whole capitalist system is corrupt. And we wouldn't want anybody to think that.

Derek McMillan

iProfits

Apple is now the most valuable company in the world at £400 billion. If that was split between all of Apple's employees (ie the people who actually do the work that makes the money) it would mean almost \$7 million for each. Probably best for them not to factor that into their budgeting though. How much do you keep in the bank at a time? Apple has \$97.7 billion in cash reserves - that's enough to write off the debt of eight EU countries! Again, we won't hold our breaths.

Friends in high places

This will come as a bit of a shock to teachers - Michael Gove is the most popular government minister. He has received more donations into his private office since the 2010 general election than any other cabinet minister including the Prime Minister and the Chancellor - £35,500 for his private office and £61,279 at constituency level.

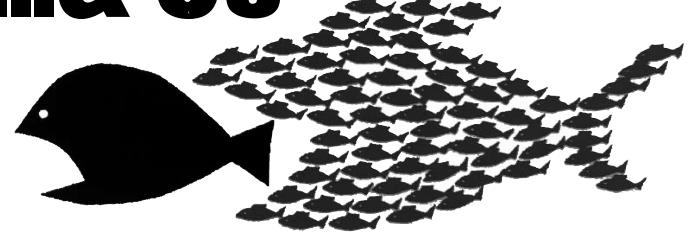
His constituency has received a staggering £284,416.40 since he became an MP. We don't know who gave him the 40p. We do know that former Lehman Brothers' banker Jeremy Isaacs donated £3,000 to Gove's office. Around three quarters of his private office donations since 2009 have come from individuals with business interests in the City. The biggest single donation to Gove's private office was £150,000 from Martin Calderbank of private equity firm Stirling Capital Partners. So obviously Gove has friends in high

Poor getting poorer...

A report by Aviva Family Finances shows that the average family in the UK owes nearly £8,000 in unsecured borrowing (things like overdrafts and credit cards) - that's up 48% on this time last year. So, are we all just getting greedier?

Well, a report by the TUC suggests some other answers. Workers are taking home £60 billion a year less in real terms than 30 years ago. That's despite being more productive than ever. And funnily enough, the only group who don't seem to be following the same trend are top executives whose pay is still going up. In fact, the ratio of executives' pay to workers' pay has gone from 47:1 in 2000 to 102:1 last year. Workers are being paid less for more work and having to get ourselves into debt to maintain any decent standard of living. And to make it all worse, the poorer we get, the richer the bosses get!

...& Us



Dead end in Davos

Ian Pattison
Youth Fight for Jobs

So-called world leaders are meeting in Davos this week, and it finally seems that youth unemployment is top of the agenda.

We know the plight of being out of work, we don't need super-rich politicians to lecture us about it. In Britain youth unemployment is a daily nightmare, and it's even worse in Greece and Spain. Today more young Spaniards are out of work (51.4%), than in a job.

EU leaders have said they might use €22 billion to tackle the crisis of rising youth unemployment. What are we going to get for our money? Tory chancellor George Osborne has called on other world leaders to cre-

ate jobs to tackle youth unemployment. Osborne should look a little closer to home. When Chris Grayling, Tory 'unemployment' minister, wrote to Youth Fight for Jobs following the 330 mile Jarrow March to defend his government's failed policies, he couldn't point to one job his government had created.

These out of touch capitalist politicians are quite happy to cry crocodile tears about youth unemployment from the comfort of conference centres in Davos, but it is their failed cuts agenda that is slamming the door on our futures.

If Christine Lagarde, managing director for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), wants to kick-start growth to create jobs, why is the IMF demanding vicious programme after vicious programme of swingeing

privatisation in Greece, plunging the country deeper and deeper into recession?

Young people are not lazy, we want to work. But we can't wait for self-proclaimed big business elites; we have to fight to defend our futures now! It has been young working class people leading the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, the mass movements in Spain and Greece and occupying Wall Street and elsewhere in the USA and across the world.

Davos leaders have no solutions to the crisis of youth unemployment, because they are tied to the capitalist system. Capitalism protects the profits of the 1%, but its time is up. Youth Fight for Jobs stands for the wealth of society being used to create jobs and meet the needs of all.

'What we heard'

There was lots of backing for TUSC standing trade union candidates in the elections for the Greater London Assembly at a London NUT teachers union event this weekend - as one rep said to me: "I was just saying to my husband, why aren't the trade unions standing candidates - and here you are!"

Martin Powell-Davies

"You're a disgrace!" spat Waltham Forest Labour councillor Clare Coghill before storming off. She was referring to library staff, sacked and victimised workers and campaigners who were protesting against the council's £65 million of cuts, including what appears to be the winding up of any proper library service. As she's my ward councillor I followed her into the surgery and attempted to discuss.

She dismissed any suggestion that the Labour council could do anything other than carry through Con-Dem cuts. In her eyes the heroic stand made by the Labour Liverpool council in the 1980s made a "joke of the left". That council, led by socialists, took on Thatcher and won £60 million for jobs and homes. Clare pointed to the links between the trade unions and Labour and claimed to hope more people became involved in politics.

But when invited to debate in front of an audience of trade unionists and working class people she declined: "I'm not stupid. I won't be drawn into an ambush".

Emma Smith



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