

thesocialistpostbag

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.

Sell-out councillors...

Standing outside Transport House on 5 March, demonstrating at Labour's local government conference, looking at councillors standing on the steps, it could have been an annual meeting of the Institute of Directors.

Those Labour councillors were a million miles away from the working class families they are selling out. We demanded that they fight the cuts. I thought of Liverpool, Lambeth and Poplar and other councils of the past that fought for workers. Now, only one Labour councillor in a majority Labour group anywhere in the country has had the bottle to even abstain and he has lost the Labour whip.

It makes you weep to think these specimens could be re-elected in a few weeks time with bigger majorities, no doubt still blaming it all on the Tories. We must redouble our efforts to sweep these people away along with their Tory and Lib Dem colleagues.

The 26 March demo should be the start of a fightback. After the TUC tops, bishops and celebrities have gone home the real task of stopping the implementation of the cuts begins, library by library and school by school. This march could be a real expression of people's anger at the Con-Dem assault on the welfare state.

Terry Pearce
Chair, Defend Our Community Services, Bracknell

...we're coming...

I'm registered blind and my first big demo was a real experience. On Saturday 5 March a whole load of anti-cuts protesters came together to march on the Labour Party local government conference. I arrived just after 11am, with others from Stevenage. We set about signing the petition that was to be handed to Labour conference delegates.

Linda Taaffe, secretary of the National Shop Stewards Network, was one of the speakers at the rally. She really got the crowd going and received big applause when she said that the Tories are coming for us, our jobs, our pensions, our benefits, our working conditions.

The phrase that will stick with me from the day is that what they don't realise is that we are coming for them! This line was repeated several times later in the rally and was an excellent point to make.

Mark Wright

...for you!

A recent leaflet circulated by the local Labour Party to residents of Forest ward in Waltham Forest, east London, criticised the effects of the cuts. It also attacked the closure of Leyton Green clinic despite one local Labour councillor, Afzal Akram, having considerable influence over decisions surrounding the local Primary Care Trust.

The pamphlet also shows images of Labour councillors Gerry Lyons and Shabana Qadir vigorously opposing cuts, when it is Labour councillors who sit on the committees that make these decisions!

While opposing austerity measures implemented by the Con-Dem government, Waltham Forest Labour councillors agree to cuts in the council chamber instead of looking after their constituents' interests by voting for a 'needs budget'.

Councillors have a choice; they can no longer be surcharged for voting against cuts. Shamefully they betray those who put them into positions where

they could put up a serious fight. Waltham Forest Anti-Cuts Union will work to put pressure on councillors to support our viewpoint but will not hesitate to stand against these people in future.

Alan Brown
Leyton Socialist Party



'Freedom' or kettling?

I'm not expecting any trouble from the police, as law enforcers for the state, at any future demonstrations. It now appears that the government are all for 'freedom' in their hypocritical support for the peoples' uprisings against regimes in the Middle East that they previously supported, including Gaddafi's! Does this remind anyone of support for Saddam Hussein before the war against him in Iraq began?

So no 'kettling' of demonstrators or the like in London on the 26 March TUC event will take place, will it, whilst we're expressing our opposition to the government's cuts agenda?

Ruthie McNally
Worcester Socialist Party

Stealing from the poor

The Con-Dem government's own figures show that 450,000 disabled people will see their incomes cut from April 2013 due to reductions in housing benefit payments. This is part of £600 million a year they want to slash from the housing budget.

Many thousands of people will be forced from their homes into inferior properties. People living in social housing, many of whom are disabled, will be disproportionately affected.

Why should a disabled person or a family with children be forced out of their home while a top banker on an astronomical salary can use millions of pounds in bonuses, paid for out of working people's taxes, to purchase up-market properties in tax havens across the world?

Dave Younger, Leeds

Save Touhama Martouf

Touhama Marouf is imprisoned in Syria for membership of the banned Communist Labour Party. On 18 February she began a hunger strike against the conditions of her detention.

She has been held since July in the political wing of the notorious Adra prison in Damascus, in a tiny cell with no light and no heat. Her health is deteriorating. Syrian human rights organisations have demanded her release, or failing that, that she be moved to the women's prison.

Please help her by writing to the Syrian Embassy at 8 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PH. And maybe if letters are sent to the Ara prison itself one or two might just get through. It has happened before for other prisoners.

Andy Ford
Liverpool Socialist Party

Sheffield jeers at Clegg's liars

ABOUT 500 people protested on Friday 11 March and 5,000 joined the 12 March demonstration in Sheffield outside the Lib Dem spring conference. Lots of young people, many who had voted Lib Dem, raged against Nick Clegg's broken promises.

Alistair Tice
Sheffield Socialist Party

They were joined by contingents of trade unionists: CWU postal workers fighting Royal Mail privatisation, RMT railworkers, PCS civil servants, Unison NHS and council workers, NUT teachers, UCU lecturers and many more local people who just wanted to show their anger against what's regarded as Clegg's betrayal of Sheffield by his joining up with the Tories.

Clegg is so unpopular in this city that his showcase conference at City Hall had to be protected by an eight foot high security fence and 1,000 police, costing around £2 million. Another three city centre streets had security fences across them ready to close off roads to kettle protesters.

A library worker told me: "It makes me so cross that they're spending £2 million on saving him when that



Many young people raged against the Lib Dems' broken promises.

photos Jack Jones

money would save library services for three years".

The police began the weekend with a charm offensive, sending blue-jacketed 'liaison officers' to reassure protesters that: "We're from the north, we're not like the police in London". Well, us northerners haven't forgotten the miners' strike!

However, the 'friendly' police were engaged in several discussions about job and pay cuts, the need for a real police trade union and the right to strike. Cameron may have made a big mistake attacking the police along with other public sector workers.

One passing civil servant told me: "After 20 years I've finally joined the union, I've never protested about anything before but what they want

to do to my pension is the final straw. And my husband is a policeman and he's getting cut too!"

The 5,000-strong march with union banners and homemade placards looked really impressive, all along Charter Row before entering Barker's Pool for a rally with speakers including Len McCluskey, the Unite union general secretary.

Lib Dem delegates were jeered through the fencing and placards were beaten on the wire mesh. There was a really good atmosphere and a feeling that this was the start of something big that would bring down the coalition government. And there was a real openness amongst 'virgin' demonstrators to socialist ideas, with 190 copies of the Socialist sold over the two days.

Protester challenges Lib Dem MP to debate

CHELTHENHAM ANTI-CUTS protester Rob Bishop has challenged Lib Dem MP Martin Horwood to a public debate over public spending cuts. A few weeks ago a copy of the Lib Dem Focus newspaper dropped through Rob's letter box.

Rob explains: "I was furious to see Martin Horwood's photo holding a Save Our Libraries placard when it's his Con-Dem coalition government which is causing these ferocious cuts.

"Horwood hijacked the protest outside my threatened local library, Hesters Way. He joined the group for

a photo-opportunity. Hesters Way is one of Cheltenham's poorest areas, so the library is very important to us I could not believe his cheek."

Rob went into action, producing a humorous flyer castigating Horwood, which members of the local anti-cuts group delivered to hundreds of homes.

Horwood said he was against certain cuts.

Rob goes on: "Lib Dem hypocrisy knows no bounds. They are opportunists and clearly oppose certain cuts to obtain electoral gain. The anti-cuts movement must expose this

type of hypocrisy or people could be fooled into believing the Lib Dems are on their side. We must fight cuts from whichever political colour they come from, be it Tory, Lib Dem or Labour."

Rob has now challenged Horwood to a public debate at a date and time of his choosing.

Rob adds: "Horwood's silent response so far has been deafening. However, the Cheltenham Against the Cuts group will be out on the streets campaigning as never before, further motivated by Lib Dem hypocrisy!"

Students want to protest too

IRECENTLY wrote to my FE college students union to ask if they were putting on coaches for students to the 26 March demonstration in London. The NUS man claimed that my college's union had no knowledge of any demonstration on this date.

I told him it was a TUC demo and the Unison union locally has at least six coaches going from Nottingham to London on that day. He said that after "student actions" on the November demo, which ended with students being kettled in freezing conditions without access to food, water or toilets, NUS would not provide coaches to any demo for its members.

They still, he said, support student "days of action" but claimed that 26 March was "aimed at those involved in

the teaching profession, and not students" which is clearly not the case.

Students also want to defeat this millionaire government, protect education from private firms and stop working class youth being totally priced out of education.

NUS clearly called the 10 November demonstration (where 50,000 expressed their rage at the dire prospects students face) to let students vent some anger. They hoped we would then quieten down and take the slaughter of our education system without a fight. This will not be the case.

Come 26 March, I will be on the streets of London shoulder to shoulder with workers and thousands of students in my position will be too.

Stuart Lambert, Nottingham
East Socialist Party

Thatcher was no heroine

THE GUARDIAN newspaper, which pretends to be 'progressive' and 'liberal' on social issues, disgracefully included Margaret Thatcher in its article on the "100 most inspiring women" to "celebrate" international women's day! This insults women and anyone who cares about women's or workers' rights everywhere. Thatcher led the neoliberal attack against the trade union rights women and men had won, and the gains we have made as a result of working class struggle - the NHS, public services, etc.

It would have been virtually impossible for the Ford workers celebrated in "Made in Dagenham", whose strike helped win the equal pay act, to organise industrial action under the trade union laws Thatcher brought in and which the current Tory-Liberal government are talking about extending.

International women's day belongs to the working class movement and to the women and men fighting today in the Middle East, in Wisconsin, Greece, Britain and around the world to change the unequal society we live in for good, not to middle class journalists.

Naomi Byron