

the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

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True blue Labour

Whatever happened to the six courageous Hackney councillors who signed a letter opposing cuts and pledging to vote against, or abstain, on any cuts in the council?

After signing the anti-cuts letter calling for "a campaign to defeat the policies of this government through public protest, opposition and defiance", all six councillors buckled to pressure from the Labour group and voted for the cuts budget or didn't dare show up to the budget-setting meeting.

Councillor Linda Kelly, who was one of the six, has felt ostracised by the Labour Party and Mayor Jules Pipe since her anti-cuts stance. She has decided to leave Labour to join those heroes of the anti-cuts movement... the Tories! Incidentally, the Tories grabbed a mere 5.3% in Linda Kelly's ward last year, one of the lowest Tory harvests of any ward in London.

If Linda Kelly really wanted to stand up for her constituents she should have voted against the cuts budget, mobilised her constituents against the cuts and been at every local lobby, demonstration and meeting of the anti-cuts alliance in Hackney. Instead she increases the hated Tory presence on the council to five.

Suzanne Beishon
Hackney

Crocodile tears

On 18 May thousands of black-clad Tamils stood in Trafalgar Square to commemorate the second anniversary of the end of the 30-year war in Sri Lanka. In the last months alone, government forces killed 40,000 Tamil-speaking people and hundreds of thousands were then detained in camps. Many still have not been heard from.

Martin Powell-Davies, national executive member of the National Union of Teachers addressed the crowd. He explained the huge capacity to build solidarity among working class people and pledged to build it among teachers.

Other speakers appear somewhat less genuine. John Mann, Labour MP, was moved to shed a tear or so when he spoke. He called for an "independent investigation into the events"; and said: "now is the time to listen... to act" but didn't actually mention the Sri Lankan government or its military. Mann's voting record raises questions over his human rights credentials. He voted for the Iraq war, against investigation into the Iraq war, for ID cards, for 90 day detention and for stricter asylum.

Emma Smith

'Reasonable' offers?

Historically capitalist employers have expected workers to be ready to move to find work. The bosses' attitude is reflected in such Tory figures as Norman 'on your bike' Tebbit in the 1980s.

Then there's today's work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith, who said "jobseekers must play their part and be willing to travel reasonable distances to take advantage of job opportunities when they arise."

According to the Sunday Times, one of



Iain Duncan Smith

the jobs advertised as 'local' in a Hull jobcentre is a cleaner's job in Chobham, Surrey, a 450 mile round trip away. Other 'local jobs' were an aromatherapist in north London and an information technology manager in Watford and even jobs in France, Greece and Turkey. Reasonable distances? With unemployment spiralling in all areas, when will we see the first jobs advertised on the moon?

Tom Black

Strike to save NHS

Leeds Keep Our NHS Public, first set up under the Labour government to fight Labour's cuts and privatisation, was re-launched recently to fight Con-Dem coalition cuts.

Leeds General Infirmary (LGI) is losing 133 beds, and 700 jobs as a direct result of the cuts. Leeds Labour council is closing mental health services like Leeds Crisis Centre as part of a £91 million cuts package. Also at LGI, the children's heart surgery unit is set for closure.

Management consultants KPMG are being paid £93,000 a month to find cuts in Leeds NHS. The one cut they should make right now is the contract with KPMG!

On 28 May, 200 NHS campaigners marched from St James's Hospital to the LGI where mental health nurse, Marc Renwick, explained that cuts aren't just happening in the NHS. 3,000 Leeds council workers face the chop. If we are to save the NHS we need to oppose all cuts.

Defending the NHS will take more than mass protest and opposition. Health workers may be forced to take industrial action against cuts and privatisation.

Ian Pattison

Bradford Pride

Socialist Party members from Leeds and Bradford took part in Bradford Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) Pride on 21 May.

We talked with local people about how the spending cuts will disproportionately affect LGBT people and how the government is scapegoating this section of society in order to divide opposition to its disastrous economic policies.

Afterwards we held the Yorkshire Socialist Party LGBT meeting where we planned similar activities in half a dozen towns and cities across the region. The following day, several party members at the Yorkshire regional committee agreed to help us with these plans.

Dave Younger

Fifa scandal

The ugly side of the 'beautiful game'

Matt Dobson

FC Barcelona's revolutionary blend of artistic flair and collective organisation in the Champions League final showed why millions worldwide love the "beautiful game". But football's world governing body, Fifa, is imploding in an ugly display of endemic corruption.

The Conacaf (North, Central American and Caribbean football federation) president Jack Warner is threatening to unleash 'corruption evidence' against a clique of Fifa executive members, around Fifa president Sepp Blatter. Warner accuses Blatter of apportioning Fifa funds for political campaigning amongst Caribbean members in the forthcoming presidential election.

Blatter's opposition candidate, wealthy Qatari businessman and president of the Asian Football Federation, Mohamed Bin Hammam, was forced to withdraw from the election after Blatter accused him of bribing Caribbean football federations for votes with support from Warner.

Warner claims to have email evidence that an ally of Blatter is accusing Bin Hammam of buying the 2022 world cup for Qatar. A House of Commons select committee highlights evidence from a Qatar based whistleblower that Qatar illegally shared votes in the host contest with Spain.

Both sides of the Fifa war are as odious and corrupt as one another - fans hate Blatter for his derogatory remarks about the women's game and jokingly dismissing the appalling record of states like Qatar on LGBT rights.

Allegedly Warner, Trinidad and Tobago's right wing pro-hanging deputy prime minister, makes huge profits from rent on his personal property, paid by Conacaf and reselling match tickets to touts through his private company.

The top of world football is dominated by gangster-like bureaucrats on multi-million dollar salaries who have squeezed money out of people's love for football for decades. This scramble for the presidency and its \$10 million annual salary ignores all consideration for football's development.

Fifa portrays itself as an internationalist organisation developing fair play and transferring the wealth that football generates to the poorest nations. The opposite seems to be the case. Allegations persist that the cor-



Sepp Blatter

ruption extends to the bribery of referees and that development aid grants to poor nations and federations are given in exchange for votes.

The media recently exposed Fifa executive members from Nigeria and Tahiti for selling their votes in contests over who should host future world cups. Fifa merely banned them from office for a few years and doled out small fines.

A Panorama documentary detailed how ISL, the world's largest marketing company, paid \$10 million worth of bribes to Fifa officials over a decade. Fifa's corruption is being shielded by willing politicians. David Cameron criticised the documentary for causing the failure of England's 2018 world cup bid.

Most likely, with no opposing candidate, Blatter will be crowned as Fifa president, but a developing culture of whistle-blowing may have a positive outcome. The corruption at football's summit shows the need to reclaim the game from Fifa's big business-funded bureaucracy.

Fans across the world will demand reform of the game's structures. Fifa reflects the image of a corrupt capitalist society and needs to be replaced with a democratic organisation controlled by fans.

Shoesmith sacking - social work under growing pressure

Sharon Shoesmith, former Director of Children's Services in Haringey, north London, was removed by Ed Balls when he was children's minister after the Baby P scandal. She recently won her appeal over the sacking. Shoesmith was sacked without a chance to defend herself but Balls wanted a scapegoat.

Predictably the yellow press - Sun, Express and Mail - howled about the compensation she would be due, including back pay from the time of her sacking in December 2008.

Where should socialists stand? The death of a child is a scandal, on any level. In this case there were foul-ups with every agency - social services, police and health. All these agencies we know to be under-

sourced and hard-pressed.

Shoesmith pointed out that it could take three to four months even to get the police to allocate an officer to a case. But will these problems go away if cuts deepen, jobs disappear and privatisation is extended - all of which the Sun, Express and Mail support?

I'm very glad that I never worked as a social worker in Haringey. I can't imagine what it is like to be covering for colleagues off with stress, seeing your caseload swell as colleagues leave and are not replaced, answering the phone at 3am when you're on call, wondering if it's one of 'your' registered children who's in hospital or worse.

Of course these pressures are in-

initely worse on frontline workers than on senior managers, and harder to bear when you're on £26,000 a year than when you are (as Shoesmith reportedly was) on £133,000. It's also true that most workers on the receiving end of an arbitrary sacking can't afford to take their employer to the High Court.

But natural justice and trade union principles dictate that we support the right to a proper defence procedure for anyone sacked from their post summarily.

For once, Unison general secretary Dave Prentis (who has done a bit of witch-hunting of his own in his time) was right to welcome the verdict.

Paul Gerrard

Gil Scott-Heron

Musician, poet and writer Gil Scott-Heron died on 27 May. He was well respected for his contribution to the arts and his influential role in radical politics in America in the 1970s. He recently returned from a tour of Europe to promote his new album, I'm New Here.

But it is his early work which is most celebrated. At his height he was prolific, releasing nine al-

bums in the 1970s, all with unique sounds, topics and takes on areas such as social inequality, family life, racism and poverty.

He was no lightweight liberal, the vociferous yet poetic statements in his albums brought comparisons with the rising Black Panther movement of the time.

He dedicated an album to the fight against apartheid when, in

America, it was an under-reported event.

When any musician dies, interest in their work is rekindled and their masterpieces re-discovered by a new generation. If you are unfamiliar with his music, or haven't re-connected with it in a while, take the opportunity to listen to a unique figure.

Ian Slattery