

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.

Release Tommy Sheridan

In view of the scandal surrounding News International (NI) and the News of the World, Liverpool Socialist Party calls for the immediate release of Scottish socialist Tommy Sheridan. We believe the police investigation into Tommy was instigated by NI on the grounds of bigotry and revenge motivated by the desire to destroy Tommy as a public socialist figure.

We also note that the police excuse for not thoroughly investigating the criminal activities of the Murdoch organisation at the time is 'they were too busy with other matters'. Why then did they waste millions of pounds and hundreds of person-hours in pursuing Tommy on the spurious grounds of perjury, the first case of its kind in Scottish legal history?

The police officer responsible for the totally incompetent investigation into NI's activities now works for the Murdoch organisation. Andy Coulson was a witness for the prosecution in Tommy's trial; he is now allegedly guilty of lying. On these grounds alone Tommy should be released.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool



Murdoch

Trade union inquiry

The spectacular unravelling of News-Corp/ News International (NI) shows the lengths to which the media, the police and other elements of Britain's state will go to in smearing and discrediting those who oppose the establishment. This is on top of moulding public opinion to accept the establishment attacks through demonisation of strikers and of campaigners on issues like the poll tax. Murdoch sacked 5,000 print workers in 1986 who, after making his profits, got in the way of "progress". The riot police's naked brutality on the Wapping picket line, with fireproof-suited, helmeted thugs raining blows on young and old seemed more concerned with protecting Murdoch than fighting crime. Now Murdoch's mobsters are seen as going too far in hacking the phones of murder victims and victims of terrorism, spying on people's grief and anguish in order to sell papers.

We must keep the pressure up on NI by demanding a trade union and community led inquiry - not one by another corruptible police force. Only when there is proper democratic control and ownership of the media will these ghastly activities cease.

Rob Windsor, Coventry

Labour originators

This week workers have seen the day that Unison dubbed 'Armageddon Day' as a Tory council in Southampton tore up thousands of workers' contracts. It comes a week after another Tory-led council announced it was taking the

same route, as Shropshire county council issued 90-day redundancy notices to its entire 6,500 workforce.

It must make the Labour councils in Neath/Port Talbot and in Rhondda Cynon Taff proud to know that they were the originators of the tactic of issuing 90-day notices to their entire workforce in order to intimidate them into accepting substantially reduced terms and conditions!

Ronnie Job



photo Paul Mattsson

Hard to stomach

Among the 25 people at a recent Tamil Solidarity meeting in Waltham Forest, north east London was a local Labour councillor. The meeting chair also read out a 'solidarity' message from the Labour council leader.

The meeting started with shocking footage from the Channel 4 programme Sri Lanka's Killing Fields, followed by speakers from local trade unions, Waltham Forest Anti-Cuts Union and the British Tamil Forum. Speakers attacked both Labour and Con-Dem governments for licensing arm sales to Sri Lanka. Speakers also said that the war in Sri Lanka and the cuts in Britain were not separate issues. Both arms sales and cuts result from putting capitalist profits before human lives.

Waltham Forest council is making £65 million cuts over four years. These cuts to jobs and services will affect all working class people, including Tamils. The Labour councillor walked out after Waltham Forest Anti-Cuts Union coordinator Nancy Taaffe, who could lose her job through these cuts, spoke. Hard to stomach the truth?

Sri Lanka's Killing Field's, which also shows up the UN's complicity in the war, can be viewed at <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/sri-lankas-killing-fields>

**Bob Severn
Walthamstow**

Youth unemployment

Swansea Socialist Party took the fight against low wages and youth unemployment into the city centre on 9 July. Using Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) material, we explained to young and old alike what effect the economic crisis is having, with a million young people unemployed, attacks on education and massive public sector cuts.

We also built support for the YFJ march between Merthyr and Cardiff from 4-6 August. Tory Iain Duncan Smith (IDS) blamed the unemployed in Merthyr for being lazy suggesting that they 'get on a bus' to Cardiff to find a job.

But there are more unemployed in the Heads of the Valleys than job vacancies in all of Wales! The march will show IDS that young people are not lazy and highlight the issue of youth unemployment.

Clare Job

Music review

"This place is coming like a ghost town..."

The prospect of mass unemployment and the threatened job losses at train-building firm Bombardier could lead to the midlands city of Derby being called a ghost town. Here, Dave Gorton writes about a hit single by the Specials, 30 years ago, which foretold a fightback.

Summer 1981 - Britain's streets exploded with rage. Brixton in April set the scene - working class youth fought back against their poverty-stricken existence and police oppression. July saw the cauldron bubbling in Toxteth, Handsworth, Southall and dozens of other areas. For me, those July days played out to the accompaniment of two



The Specials sang anti-racist, anti-Thatcher songs

sounds. One was boards being hammered into place to protect shop windows; the other was the No.1 single in the charts.

The Specials' Ghost Town, released 30 years ago, summed up an era. The 'no future' generation of 1976/77 were proved correct when Thatcher took power in 1979. The Tories started systematically dismantling much of Britain's industry and would soon start selling off public assets wholesale to her big business friends.

Unemployment had rocketed up by a million in 12 months. Whole areas of Britain looked as if they were closing down. Car, iron and steel industries were being decimated. Mining would be next - postponed temporarily only because of the strength of the National Union of Mineworkers.

The spectre of the far-right National Front (NF - one of the BNP's forerunners) haunted the streets and vicious racist attacks were all too commonplace. In Coventry, an angry but peaceful anti-racist demonstration called after the murder of Satnam Singh Gill in the full view of city centre shoppers, was attacked first by the NF, then by the police.

The Specials were formed in Coventry as a mix of black and white youth, firmly entrenched in the anti-racist movement. By 1981 they had already had six top ten singles, but will be remembered for Ghost Town.

From the haunting introduction

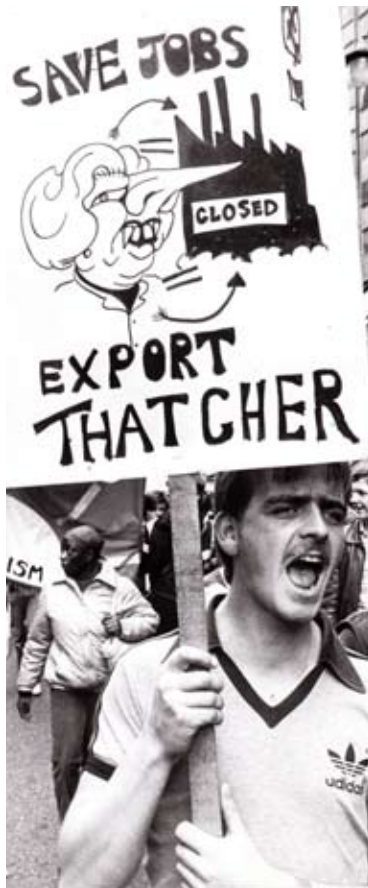
through the spoken opening words "This town, is coming like a ghost town, All the clubs have been closed down" to the trombone solo, it was something that just hadn't been heard before on Top of the Pops.

"This place, is coming like a ghost town
No job to be found in this country
Can't go on no more
The people getting angry"

The similarities between Britain in 1981 and 2011 are clear. True, the capitalist class learned a little from their past mistakes. No longer do most city centres look like they've been bombed; bright new buildings, well-lit walkways, statues and other works of art in open spaces all help to avoid the impression of utter squalor and despondency.

But capitalism's inability to provide long-lasting stability means the same problems as 30 years ago still exist - in fact they are much more acute. City centres have been given a brush-up, but in many town centres and inner city areas boarded-up windows and run-down estates are as prevalent now as in 1981.

Ghost Town defined an era. But that era wasn't unique. 1981s will recur while capitalism remains. 2011 saw the start of a massive fightback against the system which makes most people's lives a misery. The first tremors are already felt in the Middle East and North Africa, in Greece and Spain, and in Britain too. And the people are getting angry.



Fighting unemployment in 1981

Reader's comment

There is an alternative!

Steve Appleton

"The entire role of governments in Western democracies is starting to shift - has to shift - as they look across the chasm between what they are expected to do for their electorates and the resources they have available to do it. We are beginning to see how government 50 years from now will be quite different from anything in our lifetime."

That was Hamish McRae writing in The Independent (13 July). He is saying (here, and in the rest of his article) that elected governments must prostrate themselves before big capital.

"We", he says, have borrowed too much. Only £8 in every ten of government expenditure is covered by tax receipts. The other £2 has to be borrowed from the rich - and because of the crisis, borrowed at extortionate rates.

At first glance this seems a watertight argument for cuts and austerity to reduce "our" borrowing. But just a minute, "we", at the drop of a hat, managed to find hundreds of billions to bale out the banks. "We" seem to have money to renovate or replace Trident nuclear missiles, to buy aircraft carriers, to finance foreign wars, to pay through the nose for PFI projects and so on.

Furthermore, because the richest 2% to 3% do not pay taxes, the rest of us have to make up the gap. According to the Financial Times, the "tax gap" amounts to a subsidy to the richest of around £20 a week for every family in the UK.

And the commanding heights of the economy, here and around the world, are awash with cash! Even Yorkshire-based Morrisons supermarket chain has around £1 billion in cash for which it can find no profitable investment opportunities.

There is plenty of wealth in the world - actual and potential - but it is not in the hands of the people who create it. Big business capitalism is a bottleneck to progress. It cannot even utilise the resources available to it. For example, three million people unemployed in the UK represents three million person-days of lost production every year - a criminal waste of potential!

McRae is right that there is no alternative - if society has to obey the rules of corporate capitalism! In which case the burden of the crisis must be borne by working and middle class people - though it's not of their making.

But there is an alternative. We don't have to obey these rules. A powerful new party of working people and youth will transform the political landscape. With democratic socialism back on the agenda, the storm clouds of austerity and poverty can be banished.