

## the Socialist postbag

**Do you have something to say?**

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ed towards private landlords, most of whom will be unsympathetic to the tenants' situation if they can't get the rent they want.

**Alan Holdway**  
Stoke-on-Trent

**Us and them**

On last week's Any Questions, Tory Matthew Parris was talking about 'level playing fields' between the UK and Europe. He said that the UK's 'flexible and competitive' labour market was an advantage over a European state with high labour standards - and he nearly said low pay was an advantage too!

Alan Greenspan said that the economic growth in the USA in the 1990s was in part due to labour insecurity and that is what Matthew Parris was talking about when he talked about a flexible and competitive labour market.

The Any Questions panel used the phrase 'in our national interest' lots and I began to think "who do they mean by us?" The panic that set in among the elites at the idea of 'the people' in Greece voting on the robbery of their futures demonstrates clearly who the 'us' are.

**Mike Aistrop**  
Keswick

**Socialists in parliament**

I have been a Socialist Party member for almost a year now. I missed the Socialism weekend last year but to any new or potential member Socialism 2011 was the pinnacle of political debate, discussion and ideas.

One of the best parts was the rally on the Sunday afternoon with Coventry city councillor Dave Nellist. He proudly stated he opposes all cuts and has stood by that and voted against all cuts as an elected representative of the Socialist Party.

Dave noted that Labour hadn't always been a rotten party. Dave himself was a Labour MP in the 1980s along with Pat Wall and Terry Fields who opposed cuts from the Tory government, at the time headed by Margaret Thatcher.

Dave recounted the time that, in parliament, he ripped up a speech by a Tory minister announcing cuts. When Labour had principles, good honest working class fighters like Dave were more common.

**Mark Wright**  
Hatfield Socialist Party

**Cuts bring homelessness**

Government cuts to the benefits system could spark a sharp increase in the number of homeless people. Stoke-on-Trent city council has drawn up a homelessness strategy to tackle the number of rough sleepers and homeless people in the next five years.

But it warns that government plans to 'save' on housing benefit are leading to some landlords deliberately ending tenancies in anticipation of reduced income. The council's cabinet member for housing believes that the city's downward trend in homeless numbers is now under threat. The housing benefit changes could definitely make homelessness worse as many people in the city receive it.

The shortage of council houses means more and more people are being guid-

**Golden Gates**

While watching the whole Greece-Eurozone 'thriller', Bill Gates appeared on our screens. Apparently he was invited by the G20 to address their meeting, and he accepted to do so as... 'the voice for the poor'!

At this time, people all over Europe and worldwide are worrying about the bare necessities of life. Children in schools in Athens are fainting as a result of not being fed, and mothers can't afford milk and bread for their children.

It's at least ironic to seriously consider that the world's richest man could actually be representing the needs of the poor. I bet he always has far more than bread and milk stocked in his cupboards!

**Amalia Loizidou**  
Hackney, London

# Why I became a socialist

Paul Stephens explains how his experiences of unemployment had led him to conclude that we need a socialist alternative

I was unfortunate enough to lose my job at Boots early in 2009. I had been on the dole for two lengthy periods in the past, so I did everything in my power to gain employment.

I contacted every retailer in Derby, where I then lived. In the three years since, I have had only two job interviews and heard from very few of the literally hundreds of employers I have contacted.

Initially the Jobcentre asked me if I would consider retraining. I have spent the last 18 months trying to acquire funding for security training and an SIA licence to improve my employability.

I have been unable to get any help with this, either from the Jobcentre or from the two work programmes I have been forced to attend. The first programme was a year-long course in Derby, where I simply did an internet job search once a fortnight that I could easily have done - and did! - at home.

I began the more recent course last month, having recently relocated to Cornwall. This is the Ascent course at Access training on behalf of someone called Progress, I believe. Access said they cannot fund the security course and said I would have to provide all of the money for training and the licence myself, which would come to £530.

I then enquired about the Work Choice Fund at the Jobcentre, where a staff member told me I would have to be disabled to qualify. She said



photo Paul Mattsson

there is no way the Jobcentre would fund my training when there is no chance of me gaining employment in security.

I told her that not having a licence is limiting what I can apply for and asked what I could do about it. She said I should stop looking at security jobs as I am not qualified and stick to applying for admin and retail jobs, as that was where my experience lies.

When I said I could not gain employment in these areas, she seemed to doubt this and laughed. This leaves me attending mandatory 'intervention' workshops at Access for the next two years, to make me 'job ready' by teaching me skills I already possess, but refusing to fund anything remotely helpful.

Having recently found an affordable house in Newquay, I now discover that the government is to reduce housing benefit for under 35s to £65 a week in the new year so I'd

be expected to give up my home and move back in with my parents. What about the people who don't have relatives or friends who will offer them a roof over their head?

Some people say unemployed people deserve all we get, being myopic enough not to realise that they could easily find themselves in the same boat, should they be unfortunate enough to lose their jobs.

Even the BBC2 documentary with John Humphrys reinforced the myth that most unemployed people choose to be so and must be punished accordingly, despite reporting on the soup kitchens and devastation across the pond.

I do not feel represented by, or of interest to, the Tories or Labour. And as a Liberal voter for the last ten years, I am disgusted with them and ashamed that my vote helped get them into government. I fear for my own future and that of this whole country.

## Miliband the militant? No way!

**Paul Gerrard**

Labour Party leader Ed Miliband has come out in favour of the occupation at the London Stock Exchange. Wow! They've only been there a whole fortnight, but of course he had to run half a dozen focus groups to see if the occupation really was popular before he made such a bold move.

Of course when Miliband says he supports them, that doesn't mean he actually agrees with their message that 'Capitalism is crisis'. In one

interview he's quoted as saying: "I think a particular form of capitalism is facing a real crisis. I don't think the answer is to abolish capitalism. My dad probably would have believed that".

Miliband has picked up on a change in mood among workers and middle class people, as they increasingly see the system as the cause of their misery. He has tried to draw a distinction between 'predators' and 'producers', and has rounded on the - hugely unpopular - energy companies for their 'predatory behaviour'. Yet he is wedded to a market solu-

tion - more competition and simpler tariffs. Yes, Ed, that should sort it.

In reality you can't tell a 'predator' from a 'producer'. Yesterday's 'good guy' can turn very nasty indeed when profits are threatened. In any case the Socialist reported two weeks ago that just 1% of giant corporations effectively control the world economy, and most of these are financial institutions like Barclays Bank, JP Morgan Chase & Co and The Goldman Sachs Group - the ones everybody hates the most!

Sorry Ed, you just don't get it. Should have listened to your dad.

## Devon: anti-cuts activists raise an alternative

**Tom Paine**

As a feeble substitute for public consultation, John Hart, the Tory leader of Devon County Council (DCC), chaired a recent public meeting entitled "Tough Choices".

Hart aimed to show the media that the council was listening to the public. However, DCC never expected to be greeted by 30 Exeter Anti-Cuts Alliance (EACA) activists, with banners, placards and a megaphone.

The protest then entered the meeting. We were pleased to see the Monopoly-like game that had been used in previous meetings had been dropped, evidently as DCC were worried about possible action.

This board game, which Hart calls

"Devonopoly", disgustingly asks members of the public to decide which areas should be cut, in reality, who should lose their jobs, lose their services and even lose their homes.

Instead, Hart held a question and answer session, in which Socialist Party members and EACA supporters dominated.

Speaker after speaker lambasted Hart and his austerity ideology. Even more importantly a number of speakers raised alternatives, like the idea of initially using reserves and drawing up a needs budget, with some even challenging the nature of capitalism itself. EACA further raised its profile and there was interest in joining the Socialist Party.