

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.

Labour's sham conference

I watched some of last week's Labour Party conference on TV. In the 1980s, when I was a Militant supporter in the Labour Party, annual conference showed a real clash of ideas and programmes, and the leadership could be overturned at any time. Most years, some Militant supporter would make a barnstorming speech and a socialist resolution would be carried, embarrassing the leadership.

But now? Conference allows minimal participation. In the phone hacking 'debate', after two speeches, we heard a coffee table discussion between the shadow culture secretary, a journalist and a lawyer. I thought Newsnight had started early!

The 'debate' on justice and communities had a long speech from Tessa Jowell, then a video which the BBC wouldn't show because 'it was a party political broadcast'. So the only people who saw the party broadcast were delegates!

All this stage-management to prevent the cut and thrust of debate. Even witch-hunting trade union leader Dave Prentis complained that Unison's position on pensions wasn't fairly reflected in the public services composite. Yes, Dave, you can dish it out, but you can't take it! A sham conference for a sham party.

Paul Gerrard

Capitalism on trial

I listened to episode one of BBC Radio 4's Capitalism on Trial, where Tory MP Michael Portillo 'questioned' capitalism but concluded after just one episode that it's still the best system for lifting us out of poverty. No surprise there then. The programme didn't ask the hundreds of thousands of workers facing cuts to their jobs, pay and conditions, or anyone with a repossessed home about capitalism's ability to provide a secure future. The real trial of capitalism could start on 30 November when millions of public sector workers will strike to defend their

pensions that this system would like to take off them. The big business-friendly media bias won't silence the deafening shouts of working people giving evidence against capitalism and for an alternative.

If journalists go to any picket lines and give striking workers a fair hearing they will hear some questions on the viability of capitalism that they should broadcast.

Martin Reynolds

**Save our...**

An inquest into a six year old boy Ethan Kerrigan who collapsed and died of a ruptured appendix at his GP's surgery in Cornwall showed that his father took him in agony the night before to St Austell Hospital.

The privatised out-of-hours service, run by Serco, had refused to see him, asking his father Lee Kerrigan over the phone to examine his son himself. They then sent him home with advice to treat him with Ibuprofen and attend the GP next morning. Privatisation in the NHS killed Ethan.

At the same time, Cornwall Primary Care Trust is to set up a 'community interest company' outside the NHS to manage its 2,400 staff. So Cornwall's creeping privatisation of NHS services continues, even as inquests into its victims are still ongoing.

Nye Bevan, the socialist who created the NHS said "the NHS will last as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it" - now is the time to fight for our NHS, before it's too late.

Steve Bush, Devon

... National Health Service

Every class-conscious worker knows that the Tories want to cut the NHS and that anything a Tory says to object to that analysis will be a lie.

Before the 2010 election, Tory Secretary for Health Andrew Lansley signed a leaflet saying: 'I oppose any cutbacks to our A&E' against the Labour government's plans for Chase Farm hospital in London. Needless to say, post-election Lansley will oversee Chase Farm's A&E cut; to be replaced with a 12 hours a day urgent care centre.

Some workers can understandably be confused by the fog of misinformation and distortions given out. But a socialist armed with the facts and a programme for fighting back will be able to win people over to our side.

Alec Price

Privatising the gods

Nothing is sacred. The Greek government is preparing to commit the ultimate act of hubris by opening mount Olympus up for tender. Olympus has 500 square

kilometres of national forest, most of it protected land since 1938.

A quarter of this will soon be up for sale to foreign developers, the Russians being in the lead in bidding wars at present. They are dividing the forest into three, with different levels of development allowed in each component.

Already the orthodox church owns over a quarter of land in Greece. Now the government, under pressure to prevent bankruptcy, is showing the EU and IMF loan sharks that it will sell off huge chunks of what's left.

So while many new mammoth hotels are being erected, many Greeks wonder what's next for sale and how much of Greece will be left by the end of the decade.

Alex Gounelas

Arts cuts bite deep

Government cuts are hitting the arts. Many musicians, actors, artists etc, obtain finance and support via the Arts Council, which in turn was given finance from the government.

Sadly since the last general election my union (Musicians Union - MU) has seen government cuts to funding, and many musicians and musical organisations are feeling the pinch.

In my small way I do my bit to oppose all cuts. I am MU delegate to my local trades council, which actively campaigns and opposes any cuts which affect workers in its area.

Yes, the present government are arguably philistines on the Arts, but by continuing to fill the pockets, wallets and accounts of the bankers (who helped cause the financial crisis!) the government have got cuts down to a fine art.

Lin Black, Musicians Union (personal capacity)

**No Trust in Tories**

A socialist National Trust member friend was amazed at a letter from Director-General Dame Fiona Reynolds, protesting at the Con-Dem draft National Policy Planning Framework.

She writes: "The removal of much detailed guidance to local authorities leaves too much power in the hands of developers who will only need to show that their proposals will deliver growth for other important considerations (such as the impact on communities, nature and landscape) to be pushed aside.... [This] could lead to unchecked and damaging development on a scale not seen since the 1930s".

The government's anti-social policies are stirring up opposition - a letter like this over such names as the Prince of Wales could cause a few panic attacks. What next? A Countryside Alliance demo against the Tories!

Keith Dickinson

'Chav hate is class hate'

Jacqui Berry reviews 'Chavs - The demonization of the working class' by Owen Jones

I have found all previous depictions of so-called 'chavs' in the media either totally offensive, such as the ChavScum and ChavTowns websites, or patronising. So I was a bit apprehensive about this book.

Owen Jones expresses his horror at hearing an anti-chav joke at a dinner party of left-leaning professionals, but he devotes the book to understanding why open hatred of the working class, through chav-bashing, has become socially acceptable for the right-wing media.

He explains how successive governments' neoliberal policies have devastated working class communities. The wholesale destruction of manufacturing industry provoked massive resistance from workers. But, thanks to the weak policies of the union and Labour leaders, the Thatcher government largely succeeded in decimating manufacturing industry, in an attempt to reduce the power of working people to collectively improve their lot through trade union struggle.

These policies, pioneered by the Thatcher government and enthusiastically continued by later Tory and Labour governments, have created widespread, long-term unemployment, and underemployment in working class communities around the country.

At the same time, they sought to blame unemployment and poverty on ordinary people. Margaret Thatcher famously said that there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families. Failure to 'get on' is seen more as the failure of the individual.

Along with police brutality and cutbacks in essential public services, these policies were among the underlying issues contributing to the eruptions of anger seen this summer.

The lack of a political voice for working people compounded the problem. Under the recent Labour government, most trade union leaders put up little resistance to the neoliberal policies of the party they supported and funded. Nor did they challenge the myth that individual working class people were responsible for their own misfortunes.

With little opposition to free market individualism, it is hardly surprising that journalists working for national daily papers, living in an elite bubble, felt confident to express their class prejudices.

As Owen Jones says, this is not just a matter of getting people from working class backgrounds into top media jobs. The question is, how do the mass of working people regain some power and a voice within society?

The unions have a key role to play in this process. Union membership may have fallen but union members staged the biggest working class demonstration on 26 March this year since the time of the Chartists. The specific weight of the working class in society has not changed. On 30 November, with plans for two to three million public sector trade unionists to be on strike, the power of the unions will become clearer.

But working people need a political voice as well. Clearly, Labour is not in a position to do this. 13 years of neoliberal government aside, there are not the mechanisms within Labour to transform it into a party that represents working people. Owen Jones himself says: "Such



Shameless: Chavs on TV?

is the weakness of the unions that they...repeatedly voted to renounce their own powers within party structures".

So the question becomes if not Labour then what? Alongside the RMT union, the Socialist Party has raised the need to build a political alternative to Labour, as part of No2EU in the last elections for the European parliament and then as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

The Socialist Party has a proud tradition of campaigning around bread and butter issues in working class communities - not just during election times but all year round. Those serious about building a political vehicle for working class people must take up issues of cuts and privatisation, the lack of decent council housing and the absence of decent employment and training opportunities for young people.

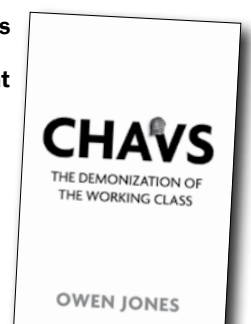
We need to build vibrant campaigns in defence of living standards in workplaces where working people can directly challenge their employers, but also in our communities, putting forward anti-cuts candidates to contest elections, standing on a programme that champions pro-working class policies. Creating a genuine political voice for working people can counter the negative prejudices fuelled by the right-wing media.

Chav hate is class hate. Re-empowering working class people would not spell the end of class hatred - the ruling class will still attack the working class. But the Chav myth dangerously tries to divide sections of working people against one another. Better-paid workers are encouraged to accept the false idea that those who fail to get on only have themselves to blame.

This idea could fuel support for savage government attacks on public services, on benefits and ultimately, the living standards of all working class, middle class and unemployed people.

What is needed is a united fight-back against cuts, austerity and the capitalist system that we live under, which siphons off the wealth created by the majority to line the pockets of a few.

Owen Jones will be speaking at Socialism 2011 in the 'Riot, reaction and resistance - what future for young people?' session - see page 11

**Socialism Today**

The Socialist Party's magazine October 2011 issue, out now, includes:

●Eurozone endgame?

Capitalist leaders are in disarray. Lynn Walsh analyses the latest twists in the euro crisis

●Libya's difficult road

The Libyan revolution is in grave danger of being derailed, argues Robert Bechert

●Women in the age of austerity

Women are under siege but are also leading the fightback, says Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

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