

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.

ESA nightmare

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Last week my local Jobcentre Plus invited me to attend a Work Focused Interview where people on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) discuss returning to work. ESA claimants are divided into two groups, a Work-Related Activity Group (WRAG) and a Support Group. WRAG claimants are expected to attend Work Focused Interviews and can have benefit stopped if they don't.

The Work Capability Assessment, which determines whether you're entitled to ESA or are shunted straight onto Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) lets only those with the worst physical or learning impairments or mental health problems qualify for ESA. Hundreds of thousands of incapacity benefit claimants now find themselves on JSA. We in the Support Group represent those disabled people whose needs are so complex that we are deemed incapable of work. But we get letters about Work Focused Interviews so we may soon have to think of preparing for work, however unfeasible this is.

Letters warn many claimants that if the Con-Dems' welfare reform bill is passed, they will be on JSA next April as ESA will be time-limited to one year for those with a history of employment. The unthinkable could soon be one step closer.

An ESA claimant**Save Sherwood Industries**

Nottinghamshire's Tory county council wants to close a much-respected local company which has been trading since 1934. Sherwood Industries at Rainworth manufactures wood products such as school furniture, and employs around 40 staff, most of whom are disabled. The council has put this closure out to 90-day consultation, but the feeling is that it is a 'done deal'.

The county council, instead of using a long-established local company that delivers custom-made, quality products to many satisfied clients, chooses to use an outside supplier that buys furniture from abroad.

There are similarities with Remploy, in that disabled people, who have often given many years' loyalty and service to the company, are being forced to join the dole queue, at the mercy of discriminating employers and a bleak jobs outlook.

Workers at Sherwood Industries have a long, proud history. The people who work there must not be casualties of a mean, penny-pinching Tory council, who are more than prepared to put them on the employment scrapheap.

Karen Seymour**1911 school strikes**

Thanks for Jack Palmer's inspiring article on the Bermondsey women strikers of 1911 (issue 687). It reminded me of an article by Clive Bloom in the September issue of BBC History magazine on the school children's strikes of September 1911.

Tying in with the huge wave of working class industrial struggles of the time, the school children's strikes rapidly spread to 62 towns and cities across Britain. The local newspaper in Llanelli, south Wales, where the movement started, reported that the "strike epidemic has infected the rising generation [who] in order to be 'in the fashion' [have] decided upon a 'down tool' policy."

A wide variety of demands were raised including on corporal punishment, hours, leaving age, holidays, attendance payments, and free pencils and rubbers. In London there were even "flying pickets" who spread the strike from Shoreditch to Islington.

Although the strikes petered out and striking pupils suffered swift and often harsh punishments, the whole episode does demonstrate that when workers take action the mood can have effects throughout all sections of society.

Bill Gordon, Waltham Forest**DWP expecting riots?**

A couple of weeks ago I attended a conference on the introduction of Universal Credit and other changes to benefits. I sat through a powerpoint presentation by a senior officer from the DWP, who described the different options that they were looking at and the possible outcomes.

As is useful in these sorts of presentations, a photo is often used to break up the slides. I nearly fell off my chair when a massive picture of a riot appeared! So it is clear what top civil servants see as a serious possibility. The benefit changes will be a disaster for people in this country

An HB worker**US workers fight back**

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The Occupy Wall Street protests (see page 6) are the beginnings of a fight-back by organised workers in the US. I visited Seattle last month. While I was there, longshoremen that drive cargo from the ships to storage facilities on the docks were on strike. So were teachers in Tacoma, Washington state. Their strike was only settled after teachers refused to obey a court injunction ordering their return to work.

There is also a long-standing battle between the unions and the Boeing aircraft company who have opened a factory in South Carolina (the US's least unionised state) to build their latest commercial airliner. They are trying to undermine higher wages and a militant workforce in Everett, Washington, who are prepared to strike to protect their pay and working conditions.

The National Labor Relations Board believes the new factory was opened to punish the Washington workers for past strikes and deter future strikes. This act may well be in contravention of the National Labor Relations Act.

So even in the world's consummate capitalist country workers are beginning to fight back.

Clive Walder, Birmingham

Neil Kinnock attacks Liverpool 47 - again!

Tony Mulhearn

Once again it's been open season on the 'Liverpool 47'. The well-heeled from the bubble of the Westminster village, Messrs Balls, Miliband, and of course multi-millionaire, ex-socialist 'firebrand' Lord Neil Kinnock took the opportunity again while the Labour Party conference was in Liverpool.

They besmirched the name of 47 brave socialist councillors who governed Liverpool from 1983 to 1987. Most of the 47, unlike these sleek purveyors of distortion, spent most of their lives active in the labour movement in Liverpool.

Kinnock's bile is revealed when he calls the 47 a 'gang' and claimed Liverpool was 'glad to get rid of Militant' (Liverpool Echo, 1 October). Such statements don't stand up to scrutiny.

In the decade up to 1983, 65% of Liverpool's industrial base had collapsed. The 47 Labour councillors inherited an appalling situation after a decade of Liberal/Tory alliance rule: the highest rents in the UK outside London and massive unemployment, particularly among youth. 35,000 were on the housing waiting list, but no council dwellings had been built for the previous two years. The outgoing Liberal/Tory council left £10 million of unallocated cuts.

These problems were tackled with a housing programme which built 5,000 new houses and demolished some of Western Europe's worst housing. Jobs were created, cuts cancelled, rents frozen, nursery schools, six sports centres and a new park opened.

All this improved the lives of thousands of Liverpoolians. In addition, a massively supported campaign was mounted which resulted in resources worth up to £60 million coming back into the city.

Kinnock trots out vacuous statements which he must have picked up back when he was masquerading as a socialist, such as: "The ultra left always believe you've got to make things grey before you make it red." He refers to "revolutionary defeatism". What does that mean? It doesn't describe with any accuracy



photo D.Sinclair

Kinnock's witch-hunt of Liverpool Labour was condemned by socialists

the programme of achievements outlined above.

As to the public concerns he claims to reflect with his slanders, he can only be referring to the feral press pack, led by Murdoch's Sun. They all applauded his 1985 Bournemouth speech when he attacked the 47, then lampooned him when he led Labour to two of the worst defeats since 1931.

Magnificent support

In addition to receiving magnificent support from the local authority trade unions, the Labour Party branches and youth, and women's organisations, the Liverpool 47 received the highest Labour votes ever recorded in the city.

If Labour nationally had received the same support, a Labour government would have been returned in 1987 instead of a strengthened Mrs Thatcher.

Kinnock's Bournemouth speech, rather than being welcomed, was roundly condemned by Labour Party and trade union organisations throughout Liverpool as well as by the District Labour Party.

"They had already fouled Liverpool in the public perception", is another pearl from his Lordship's

mouth, as is: "The precondition to the revival of the city and Merseyside was getting rid of Militant..."

He is clearly unaware that outside the magnificent waterfront which is the public face of the city, 40 people chase each job, Liverpool has the highest percentage of families without a wage earner when compared with any other UK city, thousands are still waiting for affordable accommodation, and in contrast to the 30,000 workers employed by the council in 1987, there are now under 10,000.

Thousands of jobs have disappeared and thousands of others have been transferred to the tender mercies of the private sector where jobs, wages and conditions are constantly under attack.

These closeted lords and MPs turn reality on its head. Those who built houses and created jobs are branded as "wretched" and those who implement the current savage crop of cuts are applauded.

For these people, how the media agencies view the city is infinitely more important than what is best for the city's unemployed and needy working people.

An extract from this article was published in the Liverpool Echo on 7 October.

Portrait of a pension pilferer

Derek McMillan

Maggie Thatcher was Maggie the Milk Snatcher - a byword for Tory penny-pinching cruelty. Francis Maude will go down in history as Maude the Pension Pilferer - if we let him get away with it.

The government has already renegeged on a 'solemn and binding' undertaking (and such things are two a penny with politicians) to link pensions to cost of living increases. By sleight of hand they invented a brand new measure of the cost of living and (surprise!) it comes up with a lower figure than the retail price index. Far from sympathising with the pensioners, the privileged, pampered politicians are pinching their pennies.

The government has refused to negotiate in good faith with the public sector unions. They behave

as though attacking the unions is more important than making a grown-up decision over public sector pensions.

All the teacher unions are acting together to lobby parliament on 26 October. This is where Maude's union-bashing has got him. Firstly the ATL, most inoffensive and moderate of unions, has taken strike action for the first time. Now the secondary head's union ASCL is on the march. And if the Tory Party cannot depend on the ASCL they cannot depend on anybody!

Maude should stop pretending to be a reincarnation of the blessed Margaret and remember her ignominious defeat over the poll tax. It is a pity the Labour leaders are so weak and willing because the Con-Dems wouldn't last five minutes against a half-decent opposition.

Instead we have Ed the strike-breaker and a load of Balls about

supporting cuts from the shadowy chancellor. Trade unions deserve better representation than Labour can provide - we need a new workers' party.

**Francis Maude**