

Readers' comments

Plymouth: Labour councillor confronted

'M A waste of space. Who says so? The leader of Plymouth city council's Labour group, that's who. Councillor Tudor Evans lost his rag at a public meeting called by Plymouth Fightback Against the Cuts, which invited him as lead speaker.

After he spoke I said he was big on bashing the Tories but silent on what his party would do about the cuts when, as expected, the people of Plymouth turn out the Tory administration in May.

I asked why people should put their trust in the Labour Party, given the crimes perpetrated by his party since 1997. I said that people probably need to hear him publicly repudiate his party's record before he could be trusted with people's votes.

A Labour Party member, recalling the heroic fight of Liverpool and Lambeth councils in the 1980s, asked him to consider opposing the forthcoming cuts budget and encourage other Labour groups to join with them.

Councillor Evans, the sensitive

soul, said if he'd known he was going to get a lynching he wouldn't have turned up, that the real enemy is the Tories and we need to unite against them.

On the cuts issue, he highlighted council chiefs' astronomical salaries and asked if we would object to cuts being made there. He was proud of his party introducing the minimum wage and claimed his party had "saved the NHS". When I tried to point out that the Labour Party enthusiastically carried on the Tories' dismantling of the NHS he told me I was "talking crap" and I was "a waste of space."

In answer to his Labour Party colleague he said he would be pleased to discuss what he raised 'while canvassing'. Councillor Evans' performance highlighted the problems of the mistaken belief that we should unconditionally work with Labour councillors who say they are against the government's cuts.

Rob Rooney
Plymouth Socialist Party



The Militant led Liverpool City council stood up to the Tory government in the 1980s.

Capitalism and the autistic spectrum

AS SOMEONE who works with adults with autism I agree with the points that Lucy Stokes made in last week's Socialist (issue 657). I have witnessed the frustration that people on the autistic spectrum suffer.

This frustration is not part of their condition but is a result of a lack of understanding in society, a lack of

services and a lack of diagnosis.

This can lead to mental health issues which are common in people with autism and Asperger's syndrome.

Lucy is right to blame the capitalist system for the struggle that people with autism have. It fails to provide them with choice, independence, employment, health care

or education and it hinders them from living sociable lives and even having relationships.

People on the autistic spectrum will be some of the worst affected by the Con-Dem cuts. What little services do exist are mostly in the voluntary sector and are seen as 'easy targets' for local authorities.

These services are by no means

perfect. They still work on the old model of treating people with autism like children, refusing them choices, keeping them separate from the rest of society or encouraging them to behave more 'normally'.

They are often not specific to autism but are aimed at people with learning disabilities. Autism is a communication difficulty, not a

learning disability and so services need to be different.

These services need to be publicly owned and run under democratic control by working class people, including the service users. This will only be possible under socialism.

A student social worker in Sheffield

Reviews

Construction Safety Campaign
by Tony O'Brien

THE RECENT deaths of four construction workers in an industrial accident in Great Yarmouth brought the British construction industry's appalling safety record to the headlines once again.

This book catalogues the 20-year history of the Construction Safety Campaign (CSC). Behind the slogan of "Safety Before Profits", the CSC has campaigned to raise safety standards on construction sites, and fought for justice for victims and their families.

Most of us who work in construction have witnessed an accident or a near-miss, yet there can be a culture of 'that's the way it is' amongst some construction workers. This has been brought about by years of non-enforcement of health and safety by construction companies and government agencies, exacerbated by low levels of union membership and organisation in the industry.

This makes Tony O'Brien's book essential reading for every construction worker and activist. The stories of the deaths, many of them young men in accidents that could have been avoided, are heartbreaking. Yet the determination of their families and co-workers for justice and to improve site conditions, often with the assistance of the CSC is inspirational.

Significantly, the campaign also looks further afield to arm activists with the political ideas neces-

sary to achieve victories. Employers have been ruthless in attempting to stamp out union organisation. The exposure of the bosses' blacklist of union and safety activists, as well as the CSC's support for the Justice for the Shrewsbury 24 campaign, provide us with important lessons for the future.

O'Brien goes into much depth, often almost encyclopaedic detail, of individual instances and events. However, it is rarely too dry, with the story told in an honest, open style. It is also well supplemented with photographs, copies of leaflets, newspaper articles and correspondence, cartoons and fact sheets, as well as a short appendix of poetry written in tribute to those who lost their lives.

The author doesn't hold back from exposing those who acted as obstacles either, with the leadership of the Labour Party and the trade unions coming under attack on occasion. However, he correctly identifies that the campaign's success is based in its grassroots campaigning amongst rank and file trade unionists.

The Con-Dem coalition recently floated plans to give firms health and safety "inspection holidays" and to let smaller companies become practically exempt from safety regulations under "earned autonomy", with the endorsement of the bosses and their representatives in the press. They will claim it as a vic-



28 construction workers died in the last six months of 2009.

tory in 'cutting red tape' and fighting against 'health and safety gone mad'.

However, the list of 28 construction worker fatalities in the last six months of 2009 towards the end of the book brings reality home. The ever-expanding appetite for profits by construction companies means that workers become increasingly seen as disposable.

Despite some significant victories in the last 20 years, it is clear that in the immediate future we will need campaigns such as the CSC more than ever to help defend our rights and conditions on site.

A Shropshire construction worker

Mark Thomas:
Extreme rambling

MARK THOMAS'S comedy is always original and his latest show is no exception. This time he recounts his experience of walking the length of the Israeli wall that imprisons the Palestinians of the West Bank.

With a large, helpful map of the West Bank behind him, Thomas gives his usual energetic performance, which is both hilarious and raucous. But this is contrasted with moments of deafening silence as the audience emotionally responds to his description of the appalling conditions and oppression ordinary Palestinians endure.

These include children who are regularly stoned by Zionist settlers as they try to walk to school; children who have to walk through a tunnel that doubles as a sewer under the R443 - a dual carriageway for Israeli use only, even though it cuts through the West Bank.

Then there's the Palestinian workers who start queuing at 2.30am in all weathers at an army check point, manned by Israeli conscript kids, which doesn't open until 6am, just so they can start work in Israel on the day shift.

Mixed with these terrible tales of suffering Thomas is able to extract humour, often produced by the absurdity of the situation. He describes a Palestinian crane operator who drops his bucket on the Palestinian side of the wall, workers

jump in and are lifted over the wall and deposited on the Israeli side so they can go and find work.

Or the estate agent who believes that the Israeli state can legitimately extend its borders to just south of Baghdad, as it is justified by the scriptures! Mark points out that this is the last thing the poor residents of Baghdad need, considering their recent history!

But he does leave us with a feeling of hope. He relates the story of an imprisoned Palestine Liberation Organisation bomber who found mutual respect for his Israeli guard over a cup of coffee. This was no ordinary occurrence - guards and prisoners do not fraternise in Israeli prisons and to share a cup of coffee would be seen as capitulation by both the Palestinian prisoners and the Israeli jailers.

But they met when they could and talked. This respect was repeated when rumours went through the prison that an Israeli guard was showing the visiting families respect. Nationality and religion were not important - these were working people, simply protecting their families, who found that they had much in common.

This is a show worth seeing as it is brings into stark relief the oppression of the Palestinians and the measures used to subjugate them. You will be moved.

Rob and Mel Bishop