

THE WELL UNFAIR STATE

SCHNEWS SURVEYS THE GOV'T'S PLANS FOR WICKED CUTS TO BENEFIT SYSTEM

Tuition fees got you riled up? Wait 'til you get a handle on what our Tory chums have got planned next - flagged up since the first announcement of spending cuts, the recent consultation paper entitled Universal Credit - is a massive demolition (sorry, overhaul) of the existing benefits system. With all benefits and tax credits being rolled into one system, the screws are gonna get tightened.

As part of their 'divide and rule' tactics, the present government of millionaires claim that the coming cuts in benefits are all being made against those out of work - in the interest of those in work. This is a lie. In fact 80% of those in receipt of housing benefit are working, and there will be cuts on Working Tax Credits!

The truth is that the proposed benefits cuts are not made against 'dole scroungers', they are made against all of us, whether in work or out of work, on benefits or not. Their aim is to lower wages and make us fight each other, rather than fighting against them. Only the rich and the bankers who caused the economic crisis will benefit.

According to Brighton Benefits Camapign, who alongside many around the country are staging protests - "It is not time anymore to have 'disabled', 'single mothers', or 'dole claimants' campaigns - this is an attack on everybody, especially those in work, and we need to fight together. This is NOT a struggle to protect the state and its benefits system, but to defend ourselves from a vile attack from an entrenched gang of millionaires and big businesses, who want to use the benefit system to squeeze us and multiply their profits."

Housing benefits will be one of the biggest casualties, decimated by politicians who have never in their silver-spoon lives had to worry how they're gonna pay the rent.

SQUEEZE THE SPONGERS!

While Local Housing Allowances - the amount of housing benefit you can claim - will be reduced across the board to match the lowest 30% of rents in the area (rather than the previous 50%), there are to be caps on LHA. This'll cause many of the highest price property areas, like inner-city London, to become stomping grounds of the rich only, 'cleansing' the areas from ordinary tenants on lower wages.

If you're under 35 and single, you'll only be able to claim for rooms in shared accommodation. And if you're on JSA and Housing Benefits for a year, your housing benefit will be slashed by 10%, along with the lower JSA you can receive and the hassle from the Job Centre. In the government's warped logic, the mass unemployment caused by the recession and the fucked-up sky-high rents seen as the norm are you're fault. And you have to pay.

In the biggest assault on the poorest sections of society for a generation, around 750,000 people are set to become homeless as a result of these changes according to the Chartered Institute of

Housing. With an average decrease in benefit of £12 a week, many households will be forced into spiralling debt. That's mainly working households, remember.

There's another benefit that's designed to ease the poverty and inequality that's a direct result of the capitalist system: Tax Credits.

These are set to be abolished in 2014, and are being cut now. Although Child Tax Credit looks safe for the time being, draconian cuts are being made to Working Tax Credits. Parents will have to work 24 hours a week to qualify at all, and from April 2012, if your income decreases by less than £2500 you'll still not be entitled to any increase in your Working Tax Credit. This'll cause extreme hardship. According to estimations made by the Tax Credits Unit at least half a million working families will lose more than £1,000 per year due to these changes.

DOLING OUT PUNISHMENT

If this makes you want to escape the rat-race and earn your crust on your own terms, you're out of luck. If you're self-employed you will have to prove your earnings work out at the minimum wage for your hours. If you work less than 16 hours a week (or even more) you'll be categorised as an unproductive member of society - and forced into the job centre to sign on and look for a 'real' job.

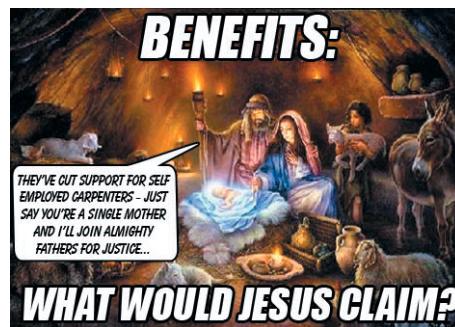
Finally, many of those currently receiving Disability Living Allowance may lose their entitlement after it's replaced by the stricter Personal Independence Payment. Bizarrely, if you can use your wheelchair, for example, you won't be entitled to the mobility component of the benefit.

All of this will be obsolete in 2014, when most benefits including tax credits and housing are simply deleted in favour of a 'Universal Credit'. In line with the government's plan to get us all slaving away at insecure and badly paid jobs, this plays into the hands of the monster corporations who'd prefer not to have to give us secure employment and decent wages. No wonder so many big business bullies like M&S and Boots gave the government their whole-hearted support.

This is the crux of the government's ideologically-driven assault on welfare state, and that old-fashioned idea that just maybe, people have a right to decent work and a decent wage, to be able to support and house themselves and their families.

Resistance is brewing. Across the land, people are realising that the selfish, money-grabbing twats in power and their business cronies can't get away with it. With the biggest splashes so far coming from the student demos and the tax avoidance actions prompted by UKUncut (see SchNEWS 746,751), the coming months will see action on a wider scale.

To read the full proposals www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/legislation-and-key-documents/universal-credit



SOAR POINT

RATCLIFFE POWER STATION GUILTY VERDICT

"Taking action on climate change is not an act of moral righteousness, but of self-defence. History is full of ordinary people who have acted to protect their fundamental rights and we need a strong movement of people doing just that. We want to reiterate our support for everyone fighting for climate justice." - Ratcliffe Defendants statement.

This week, as world leaders predictably failed to come up with a global carbon emissions policy in Cancun there was a disappointing result for twenty climate campaigners in Nottingham Crown Court. The twenty defendants were charged with 'conspiracy to aggravated trespass' after a mass arrest in April 2009 (see SchNEWS 672) prevented an action taking place against Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station. After three days of deliberation the jury in their case returned a unanimous guilty verdict.

Altogether 114 activists were arrested in the raid on the school. Most later had their charges dropped. Of the twenty six who went to trial, twenty decided to run a 'necessity' defence, admitting that they planned the action but maintaining that their main purpose was to prevent the emission of 150,000 tonnes of CO2 during the week that Ratcliffe was to be shut down. One team of protesters would have pressed the emergency stop buttons on the coal conveyors which feed the boilers, while another team would have climbed the inside of the chimney before abseiling into the flues to prevent the plant re-opening for a week. Six others who are due to stand trial in January are maintaining that they were not part of the plot.

The occupation was meticulously planned and was intended to last for a week. However, during the prosecution case it was revealed that police knew about the plan at least five days in advance. In the end the prosecution only produced one witness - Raymond Smith, the power station manager. Apparently, according to a source close to the trial, two senior police were due to give evidence but were pulled at the last minute. Its unknown whether this was to avoid awkward questions about police intelligence gathering. (Undercover cop Mark Stone / Kennedy - see SchNEWS 745 - was present when the school was raided.)

Ratcliffe-on-Soar, owned by German energy giant E.ON, has been the repeated target of environmental activists. In 2007, activists from Eastside Climate Action succeeded in infiltrating the plant (see SchNEWS 583). In October 2009, a thousand activists converged on the site in the Great Climate Swoop (see SchNEWS 696). As a coal-burning power station it kicks around ten million tonnes of CO2 into the atmosphere every year. While he was on the stand the station manager admitted that the station burned coal rather than cleaner gas solely to make profit.

As both the defence and the prosecution were in agreement that a conspiracy to shut the power station down existed, the defence case rested

entirely on the necessity of preventing emissions to save lives. The defence were allowed to present an impressive array of witnesses, including James Hansen (a NASA climate scientist) and Caroline Lucas (Green M.P for Brighton) When commenting on the motives for the defendants, James Hansen said, "It doesn't surprise me that young people are angry when they know that politicians are lying to them.

The prosecution countered these arguments with a variety of bizarre celebrity-fixated schemes. Wouldn't it be better, their arguments went, that the 15 grand action budget been better spent on buying Cheryl Cole a wardrobe of second-hand clothes or flying David Beckham to the Cancun Climate Summit? (What dizzying logic). The prosecutor even felt the need to tell the jury that she had a compost toilet herself, before being informed by the judge that her personal life really didn't have any bearing on the case.

In fact given that the case went so swimmingly well until the verdict - what went wrong? SchNEWS spoke to one defendant who said, "The whole thing has been an amazing experience, the plan went wrong but it was worth a shot. Of course there's no way of looking into the mind of the jury but I wish one of us at least had done without a professional defence. If we'd run the defence in person then we'd have been able to probe harder and get away with more than the barristers could. But people are learning from it."

Sentencing has been adjourned until January 6th. The trial of the six who deny their involvement begins on the 10th.

* For a full run-down on everything that happened see www.ratcliffeontrial.org

NO WHITE XMAS AFTER ALL

The EDL fascist freakshow rolled up in Peterborough last Saturday (11th), with a crowd of over 500 turning up to spit out their usual hatred and nonsense.

Around a hundred gathered for a union-organised counter demo, reinforced by 150 mostly Muslim youths as they reached the city centre. Hundreds more assembled to protect the local mosques and Muslim areas.

At one point around 100 rabid racists broke away from the main pack and tried to attack the counter-protesters. The anti-fascists stood their ground and repelled the attack.

The day also saw mockney munter and de facto EDL leader Stephen Yaxley Lennon (or good ol' Tommy 'from the block' Robinson as he prefers to be known) make a speech aligning the EDL with the police, who apparently "allow our democracy", and trying to craftily get himself in with the pro-Tory mood sweeping the nation by criticising the "so-called fucking students" and their disgusting revolt. It will be interesting to see how this new line sits with the pissed up pig-baiting violent numbskulls that congregate at every EDL demo.



ANOTHER SMASHING WEEK

In the run up to Christmas, Brighton's local death dealers, EDO MBM, were handed three days of gift-wrapped action by Smash EDO campaigners.

On Monday (13th), they were bombarded with a surprise noise demo at 10am. Around 15 protesters gathered to vocalise their anger over the company's immoral practices and in response to the 'Anti-repression' call to action.

Tuesday (14th) saw three people glued and locked to the bomb factory's gates at 6am. Staff were unable to gain access until Paul Hills, EDO MD, once again had to angle-grind through his fence to allow his minions in. Police were soon on site but by 9am had packed up their notepads and headed off into the unknown. It seems Hills would rather avoid another round in court following his dirty business coming under close examination during the Decommissioners trial last July (see SchNEWS 729). At 11am, everyone detached themselves from the gates and walked away with no arrests.

The final chapter for this year was a last noise demo on Wednesday, with 10 cacophonous agitators belting out their dissent din for 2 hours.

The saga will continue on January 5th when the noise demos start back up.

*www.smashedo.org.uk

WIKI-KEEPER BAILED

While the revelations of corruption, sleaze and abuse of power continue to ooze out of the Wikileaks vault of diplomatic cables, the information war it has provoked continues to rage (see SchNEWS 751).

The Wikileaks site itself has never been more secure. Following the removal of its host servers, more than 1,300 volunteer 'mirror' sites have sprung up to foil any attempts to plug the leaks.

Not so secure are those companies and institutions that have turned on Wikileaks; the denial of service attacks launched by hacktivist swarm 'Anonymous' continue. Websites taken down this week include senate.gov - the site for every US senator, and the Swedish prosecutors website.

With thousands downloading the software around the world (although it is unclear how much good most amateur hackers can do with it), police have also upped their efforts to crack down on the attacks. Two Dutch teenagers have been arrested while Scotland Yard claims it is also investigating.

Back in the world of three dimensions, Julian Assange has finally been granted bail as extradition proceedings continue, to howls of protest from the Swedes. Protesters gathered outside the court to show their support for the cause celebre.

In a separate action on Monday (13th), a band of Blighty-based Aussies occupied the foyer of Australian embassy to demand the release of Assange. While they constructed a makeshift shrine to the war dead in Afghanistan, an armed response unit was swiftly dispatched to the embassy, followed by three vans of riot porkers, handily already in the area for student protests.

GAZA VIGIL

Between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, 'Operation Cast Lead' saw over 1400 Palestinians killed by Israel in a brutal and illegal attack on the Gaza Strip, destroying lives and infrastructure. Two years on, that infrastructure is still in tatters due to Israel's blockade. Families are still living in tents. UN schools are unable to rebuild as Israel blocks concrete and building supplies.

*Vigil outside the Israeli embassy, London, 27 December 1-3pm to mark the second anniversary.

www.palestinecampaign.org

A COCKTAIL OF TWO CITIES

Molotov-happy Greeks set Athens in flames on Wednesday (15th), as the country was gripped by another general strike.

With a new labour law, state repression and austerity cuts fuelling the dissent, the strike began at 11am with crowds congregating in the district of Exarcheia. The bar was set high early on as the Ministry of Economics in Athens was set on fire by a molotov blitz.

All stately cars in front of the luxurious Grand Bretagne and the Saint George hotels, which are situated in front of Parliament, were burned. The hotel entrances were also attacked with fire, while police were used as molotov targets.

At this point the police split the demonstration using tear gas and brute force. People returned to Parliament anyway and burned the riot police bus situated in front of the national garden next to Parliament. Near the Polytechnic a Delta motorcycle force was attacked by protesters when they drove into the demo.

By mid-afternoon, the district of Exarcheia was overrun by rioters and it was impossible to enter the area. Even after police retook the area, skirmishes continued by the University of Economics and around the Polytechnic. Protesters returning from the demonstration tried to occupy the offices of the General Confederation of Workers but the anti-riot team got in the way.

Reports state 23 people were detained in Athens and of those, 10 were arrested and face charges. Another 20 were arrested in Thessaloniki. One protester ended up hospitalised after being run over by a police moped.

The demo saw police make use of a water-cannon vehicle for the first time. A new tactic used by the demonstrators was the use of fire extinguishers to keep police away. Vast amounts of tear-gas were used by police to try and control the crowds that are reported to have reached numbers as high as 200,000.

We're all off for our dangerously near traditional end of year break (so the country will probably kick off massively in the next three weeks).

SCHNEWS WILL RETURN

...IN 2011: A MYSPEACE ODDYSSEY

...and finally...

Late entrant for misplaced marketing stunt of the year: Gigantic tax avoiders Vodafone (ironic tagline: "Power to you") picked last week to launch a new online competition. Great timing following weeks of public actions and pickets in it's stores up and down the country (see SchNEWS 746) by people foaming at the mouth over the massive tax breaks given to them by the government just as their equally massive cuts programme was being implemented.

The new campaign, called #mademesmile rolled out on Twitter, and asked users to submit examples of things that had made them smile recently. The best would win a swanky free phone on each of the '12 days' of Christmas (Nice work advertising guys!). In a matter of hours the operation was hijacked by anti-cuts group UK Uncut and swiftly became the most deliberated twitter topic in the twat-o-sphere and thousands tweeted in to voice their indignation and relive all the shop shaming that had left them smiling recently. Many of the 'tax dodging scum' posts were then automatically uploaded to the main Vodafone site before the company wised up.

Well it madeussmile.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS advises all readers, sign on, tune out and drop off the radar this Christmas. Honest.

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