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Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network

Satire is dead. How can we exaggerate the actions of politicians who have already gone further than had once seemed possible? How many times do we end up commenting – 'you couldn't make that up'? The first week in July, the Westminster tragicomedy included Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, claiming that the Bedroom Tax is a 'success', and his Under Secretary, Lord Freud, arguing that the growth of foodbanks is not a result of benefit cuts but just people wanting free food. And that followed George Osborne playing fast and loose with economic statistics – and Labour almost totally forgetting that the clue to being the official opposition is in the name. One comment, though, appears to have been closer to the bone than intended. The *Guardian* points out that Osborne's claim that 'Britain is moving out of intensive care and from rescue to recovery' could be rather less optimistic than it sounds: 'the phrase is used by the emergency services when the disaster has moved on from its initial phase and they expect to find no more survivors, just corpses.'

Far away from the Westminster bubble, we look at what is happening in our communities, and find echoes of fascism in the Government's attacks on the disabled, and evidence of sanctions targets in Leith Jobcentre.



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NEWSLETTER 11

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John Cooper of the SUWN and Glasgow Against Atos looks at

THE CULL OF THE WORKING CLASS

The dreaded Bedroom Tax is the latest blow in the Tories' coordinated assault on the working class, particularly on our most vulnerable members - the sick and disabled. It has been estimated that eight in ten people affected by the Bedroom Tax are disabled. Many have already been through a work capability assessment, conducted by the French firm Atos on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, that has resulted in them losing their benefits. Michael Meacher MP led a Commons debate on 17 January this year in which he criticised almost every aspect of Atos's operations, including the thousands of people who have died after being declared fit for work. Atos has been widely and repeatedly criticised by the British Medical Association, and is subject to constant lobbying by disabled groups throughout the country.

This callous treatment of the sick and disabled goes hand in hand with a sinister trend of political thought, which has gained momentum over the term of the present Government, that sees welfare benefit claimants and those at the very bottom of society as lazy, dishonest, stupid scroungers who are less than human. The Government's sustained attacks on the weakest in society are reminiscent of the Nazis' treatment of some of their own citizens prior to the beginning of the Second World War, when they 'assessed' the sick and disabled to see if they were physically and mentally fit to live. The German authorities managed to 'de-humanise' the sick and disabled through written and pictorial propaganda. This eventually led to the extermination of thousands of people.

An article in the *Guardian* on 11 May 2013 reported on research carried out at the University of Louvain by Jacques-Philippe Leyens that suggests that low status groups, including the poor, homeless people, drug addicts and welfare claimants, are seen by others as

less than 'fully human'. Leyens has coined the term 'infrahumanisation' to describe this development of everyday dehumanisation. As Robert de Vries wrote in the *Guardian* article, 'The Government's cuts to welfare benefits are causing real harm to a lot of innocent people, nevertheless, remarkable numbers seem to be willing to support them', and 'People struggling to get by in their own lives will find it hard to sympathise with those they feel are getting a free ride'. The success of Government propaganda about 'scroungers' can be seen in programmes such as *Question Time*, where the phrase 'strivers not skivers' has been enthusiastically adopted by many members of the audience.



This Nazi poster for the magazine New People, produced by the Bureau for Race and Politics, reads: '60,000 Reichsmark is what this person suffering from a hereditary defect costs the people's community during his lifetime. Fellow citizen, this is your money too'.

Another ruse used by the Government to justify their unrelenting attacks on the working class is the mythology that cuts are necessary. Although they claim that 'we are all in this together', the idea that those at the top of society will suffer just as much as those at the bottom would be laughable if it were not so insulting and contemptible. The very people who decided to cut the living standards of working-class people are expecting to see a pay rise that will take them to at least £74,000 a year - yet they have the nerve to say that we all have to share the pain! And of course the bankers still get their bonuses (which have reached a record high), and multi-nationals manage to dodge paying tax.

The claim that cuts in public services are necessary at all is a complete lie. As Tony Benn said, 'If you can find money to kill people, you can find money to help people'; yet, according to UK Government figures, Britain spent at least £9.24 Billion in Iraq and £11.1 Billion in Afghanistan between April 2001 and March 2010. So it would seem that there is plenty of money to wage illegal and pointless wars, but not enough money to create a caring peaceful society.

Working-class people are being attacked daily in this class war being waged from above. Thousands of people die every year after Atos declares them fit for work. For many, the stress of the assessment process has contributed to an early and miserable death. People are being made to work for benefit money, or deprived of benefits through sanctions imposed on the flimsiest excuse. Workers are forced to accept worsening pay and conditions through fear that they too will join the millions of others living on the breadline. The Government have declared war on the working class: if you aren't in work, or are sick or disabled, you don't deserve a decent life or human respect - you are what the Nazis called 'a useless eater'!

The only way we can halt this slide into fascism is for ordinary working-class people to organise and fight back. We have to combat all the cuts that the Government and their friends in big business are trying to impose on us. We need to show our fellow workers that we have nothing in common with the bosses or politicians, and that we must build our own organisations and strong communities to unite against them. Only then can we hope to win the class war.

Glasgow Against Atos has now been holding monthly pickets outside the Atos offices on Cadogan Street for a year



Wendy Walton of Greater Leith Against the Cuts finds

JOBCENTRE STAFF TOLD TO 'ASPIRE' TO SANCTION MORE CLAIMANTS

The newly-appointed manager of Leith Jobcentre Plus has told staff that they are NOT sanctioning enough. I was told by a member of staff that an email was sent out by the manager early on the morning of July 1st (the day I was informed of my own month-long sanction) ordering jobcentre staff to meet targets set out by the Coalition Government. The reliable source is a benefit advisor. He told me outside Leith Jobcentre that same day that claimants are not always informed about their rights to appeal or to apply for hardship payments. He also informed me that management are alleging that over 30% of claimants are 'not meeting the requirements for receiving benefits'. He said something needed to be done to inform claimants of their rights to appeal through the Reconsideration and Appeal Process and/or apply for Hardship Payments. Sanctions can result in claimants' benefits being stopped for one month to three years, depending on the severity of their misdemeanour. Sins, such as arriving a few minutes late due to child sickness or the now legendary Edinburgh traffic jams caused by tram works, will result in written warnings, followed, if claimants are late again, by a lengthy one month sentence when they receive no benefit at all. Missing an appointment and not providing sufficient reason for non attendance will result in a humiliating process of answering to DNA (Did Not Attend) staff, which involves giving a written statement as to your reasons for non attendance that, regardless of the reason, will always result in a sanction.

It appears there are no distinctions as to who staff sanction. Single-parents, new claimants, old, and young are viciously sanctioned due to what appears to be a government target-driven initiative. Leith claimant, Julie (a single parent and first time JSA claimant), reported voicing her concerns over the revelation of the email with her signing advisor on July 2nd. She told me that she had been sanctioned for a whole month for a missed appointment, leading to 40% of her benefits being deducted. Her advisor confirmed the email and said it had stated that advisors should reach these 'aspirations,' or face Personal Improvement Plans, 'if PIP were not met, staff could face the sack.'



This demonstration of 30 to 40 people outside Leith Jobcentre - called by Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty (ECAP) and Greater Leith Against the Cuts - was heavily policed. (Picture from ECAP)