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STRIKE BACK AT THE CUTS!



Support the 30 June action! No cuts – make the rich pay!

DOES SNP MAJORITY THREATEN LABOUR'S UNION LINK?

by John McAllion

ALEX Salmond has long cultivated his image as a man of the Left. A founder member of the SNP's socialist and republican 79 group, he was seen as a key left-wing ally of Jim Sillars during the wilderness years that followed the SNP's loss of 9 of its 11 seats in the 1979 General Election. He was even briefly expelled from the SNP in the early 1980's because of his left-wing factionalism.

As SNP leader, his condemnation of NATO's bombing of Serbia along with his opposition to the Iraq war and his determined opposition to nuclear weapons and power positioned both him and his party to the left of the Labour leadership in Scotland.

As Scottish First Minister, he cleverly outflanked Scottish Labour on the left with a string of progressive measures from free school meals to no tuition fees and the replacement of private with public finance on major capital projects.

The scale of Labour's defeat in May's election now presents Salmond with an unprecedented opportunity to further embarrass the Labour leadership in Scotland.

With 5 unbroken years of majority government assured, he can use the full panoply of Holyrood powers to woo Scotland's trade unions in an attempt to drive a SNP wedge between the Scottish Labour Party and its traditional allies in the wider Scottish Labour movement.

The STUC will find it difficult to resist the SNP Government's advances.

Already some in their ranks have recognised the extent to which the Scottish political landscape has been changed by Labour's electoral collapse. One senior Scottish trade unionist described Labour's recent defeat



as the party's "worst election result in Scotland since 1931".

Very few other Scottish trade unionists would quarrel with this analysis. Labour's share of the popular vote was its lowest in nearly ninety years. The SNP took 53 constituency seats to Labour's 15. Labour's constituency vote fell by nearly 300,000 compared to 1999, with the biggest falls in areas with working class voters and relatively high social deprivation.

In a single night Labour's electoral domination of working class west central Scotland was comprehensively smashed.

Salmond is determined to exploit this Labour weakness to the full. Senior SNP Ministers have already held talks with the STUC and more are planned in the near future.

The agenda up for discussion has included public sector pensions, low pay, a living wage, slowing down the outsourcing of council services and the guaranteeing of public sector jobs.

Salmond is also keen to progress direct talks with the STUC leadership on his as yet vague ideas about "a social wage" to be underpinned by a pact between politicians, public services and the people.

Clearly the new SNP Government is more than keen to do business with Scottish public sector unions, leaving

their opposition Labour shadows looking powerlessly in from the outside on what Salmond hopes will be a developing relationship between Scotland's nationalists and trade unionists.

For their part Scotland's trade unions face big political decisions. They will have to do business with an SNP Government backed by an unprecedented electoral mandate and with majority control of Holyrood's levers of power.

Safeguarding their members' interests, particularly in the public sector, will demand at least that minimum of cooperation. But will they be able to broker the best possible deal for their members with the Scottish Government while at the same time seeking to politically undermine that Government by publicly supporting and funding the main political opposition to it?

Some may now argue that the time has come for the unions to reassess their relationships with Scotland's two main centre left political parties. They may contend that the historic scale of Scottish Labour's defeat will exclude that Party from government for the next two to three parliaments. Some may even doubt that Labour will be able to recover at all.

In any case they will maintain that for the foreseeable future

the SNP are the best centre-left hope for progressive legislative change on behalf of working people in Scotland.

Meanwhile the UK Labour's attempt to recover its lost support in Southern England could simultaneously be driving Miliband's Party ever further to the right and further away from the traditional policy priorities of Scotland's grassroots labour and trade union movement.

As UK Labour refines its pro-business policies and chases the votes of the largely non-unionised "squeezed middle" in the South, both it and the British union it stands for could appear increasingly irrelevant to trade unions struggling to defend wages, conditions, pensions and investment in an embattled Scottish public sector.

None of this, of course, is a done deal.

The SNP has its own trade union demons to confront. The new Government will have to implement savage cuts to public spending that will threaten jobs and open the way for privatisation across the Scottish public sector.

It is already committed to freezes in public sector wages and council tax increases that will impact badly on council spending and inevitably bring it into conflict with public sector unions across Scotland. It remains even more pro-business than Labour.

Indeed, were the SNP Government to be confronted on its left by another wholly autonomous and national party that was also a serious contender in Scottish elections, it would very quickly find itself in deep political trouble. Salmond's great fortune is that the other serious contender in Scottish politics is neither autonomous nor on his left, while the other autonomous parties on his left are not serious contenders in Scottish politics.

Food for thought.

NEW YORK RESISTS

by Pete Murray
NEC member, National
Union of Journalists

ANYONE on the British or American left, and anyone with even the sketchiest knowledge of hip hop will know that phrase: “the Revolution will not be televised”. Those – like me – who have been inspired and uplifted by the work of Gil Scott-Heron will be heartbroken to hear of his death in a New York City hospital earlier this month.

His view of America – as well as his calls for justice, peace, equality and dignity, and fair pay for all – came from a tradition of resistance and protest which many outside the US hear little about.

But having spent the last week in New York, it's clear that spirit of protest is alive and well – and gaining new confidence.

Beyond May 12 is part of a coalition of community and trade union activists, education and social welfare campaigners, war resisters, and hosts of others who helped organise a magnificent occupation and teach-in on Wall Street on that day – in the very belly of the beast of capitalism.

“People were speaking with one voice,” says Kristi Barnes from the campaign group Align, one of scores of groups which took part in the demonstration. “Saying that there are better choices that (New York Mayor) Bloomberg can make in this budget.

The 98 per cent of New Yorkers who are not billionaires are being adversely affected by this budget and need to make their voices heard.”

She goes on: “May 12th



didn't happen in a vacuum. We've been seeing our own 'New York Spring' in terms of people mobilising, whether it is against the State budget that was recently passed or whether it was in solidarity with workers in Wisconsin, we've seen almost weekly demonstrations or rallies.”

Indeed, in the days immediately before the Wall Street march, there were a series of protests and occupations in the city's financial district by tax justice campaigners. Keith Gamble, who's on the board of Community Voices Heard in East Harlem, helped train participants for some of the events, which targeted Bank of America and Chase Bank, Goldman Sachs and hedge fund companies which have been advising organisations how to evade their taxes.

“We made a big fuss and a lot of noise,” says Keith. “To cause a bit of a stir, to get these financial heads to start noticing us.”

In a sense, the city government is attempting to

use the financial crisis and the collapse of the economy to impose a form of structural adjustment on New Yorkers.

As employers across the United States have shed millions of jobs, state tax revenues have collapsed, which means local governments are trying to plug their budget gaps by cutting vital services. It's also an opportunity for employers to attack unions, push wages down to minimum levels and below, and cut benefits.

So it's inspiring to see that the fight-back is growing and winning wide support among trade unions and campaigners for change – and a reminder that this wave of protest belongs to a long and honourable tradition in the USA.

Writing in “The S Word” – a newly published history of socialism in America – John Nichols describes how “socialist ideas... have shaped and strengthened America across the past two centuries.” In an opening meditation on the words engraved below the

Statue of Liberty in New York harbour, Nichols writes:

“Every child should know America is not the foreboding behemoth a succession of misguided and ill-intended presidents have sought to make it...”

He quotes from the 19th century political economist Henry George, who wrote that: “The progress of civilization requires that more and more intelligence be devoted to social affairs and this not the intelligence of the few, but that of the many. We cannot safely leave politics to politicians, or political economy to college professors. The people themselves must think, because the people alone can act.”

In precisely that vein, says Keith Gamble:

“We need to continue the direct action, for example by turning these bank buildings into health clinics, schools, real job centres.

“We are saying this is not a city only for the very rich and we're not going to let you turn it into that.”

THE POWER OF FOOD

by Roz Paterson

“FOOD is about power – those with power...can eat.”

So said Irungu Houghton, Oxfam’s Pan-African Director, upon publication of the charity’s latest report on the world’s dangerously dysfunctional food system.

Consider this: in the UK alone, we thrown away 8.3million tonnes of edible food each year, while one billion people elsewhere starve.

Meanwhile, land is appropriated from subsistence farmers, often women supporting families, to grow corn crops used to make ethanol to provide a ‘green’ alternative to petrol for cars.

And in the financial centres of the First World, speculators gamble on the future price of wheat and other essentials, whilst in the population epicentres of the Third World, landless peasants queue up for basic food they can no longer afford to buy for themselves.

In a globalised market, food has become just another commodity, to be stockpiled or squandered as and when the price is right, and to hell with those who cannot afford the price shocks this entails.



So far, 2011 has provided plenty of these.

In north Kenya, for instance, the cost of flour has rocketed 60 per cent in less than six months, and this pattern is seen across Africa, putting staple foods beyond the reach of increasing numbers of people.

Yet, says Houghton, “Africa is capable of producing enough food to ensure all our citizens have enough to eat, yet every night, millions of people go to bed hungry.”

To put the problem right, Oxfam suggests a series of measures, including the protection of land rights for small

farmers and women smallholders, plus capital support and access to water; an end to speculation in essential foodstuffs; and an end to US subsidies for biofuels, such as corn-based ethanol.

To summarise, if agriculture is geared to meeting domestic needs, then everyone would be healthier. Not only that, but the environment would be better preserved, thanks to long-term planning, utilisation of local knowledge, and less demand on resources.

However, multinational corporations would not become richer

doing it this way and, as things stand, there is the insurmountable obstacle.

Or is it?

Scotland could certainly feed itself, being a country rich in natural resources, but like everyone else on our beautiful blue-green planet, we are dependent upon a merciless system of profiteering at the expense of not just people, but every other consideration besides.

But we could do things very differently.

We could create a rural economy geared towards, not the global market, but meeting the needs of the population, providing

good, organic food for schools and hospitals, sustainable biofuels for public transport, and sustainable timber and other materials for building and fuel.

We could, as Oxfam suggests for Africa, support smallholders and community farmers, and provide government grants to establish food co-operatives to provide a bulwark against the supermarket giants, plus grants to purchase up-to-date technology, to keep rural schools open, and to build quality social housing for service and seasonal workers.

Monsanto and the markets wouldn’t like it, but we’d see the pay-off in the improved health of our children, the bolstering of our rural communities and a sense of continuity between countryside and city.

And if you need some numbers, consider how many millions we’d save in healthcare if we weren’t dying of bad food and obesity, how many millions we’d save on edible food thrown away to landfill, and how many millions would go to bed content, rather than hungry, because we weren’t part of a system that was sucking up their food resources and giving them nothing in return.

A MINISTRY FOR ALL?

SOAPBOX

Morag Balfour

THE blustery winds of change were felt at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland recently. Whilst the “change” in question may seem infinitesimally small to outsiders, that movement may well alter the character of the institution forever.

Well, I’m hoping it will anyway.

I’m Quaker and so I’m not heavily invested in the C of S but some of the folk dearest to me are and they’ve been anxious of late.

The work of (currently) openly gay ministers is being affirmed at least for now and a group has been set up to look at the church’s thinking on the training of openly gay people for the ministry in the future.

They’ll report back in 2 years, armed with recommendations.

Homosexuality is a fairly hot potato in many religious communities. I am thankful that’s not the case in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). I was asked to try and explain why homosexuality is such a deal-breaker in the church generally, and I’m at something of a loss in trying to articulate it.

The Bible says lots of contradictory and confusing things, was written several thousand years ago and doesn’t automatically reboot itself when new ideas and information comes to light.

It’s important to point this out even though I’m stating



the obvious. For some people, there is a demand in their faith that they take everything written in the Bible literally, or at least the stuff pertaining to sexual activity.

Christians are, often as not, kinda squeamish about sex. That’s allowed. They can also be way too enthusiastic in their denunciations of it as well, and that is interesting.

One might say they are sex-obsessed.

There are quite a few passages in the Bible that condemn homosexual sex. Some of them sound really odd when you take the time to read the paragraphs surrounding the bit that’s been cherry-picked to condemn folk.

In a strict literal reading of some of the old testament homosexuals should be stoned to death! And yet sandwiched next to that, you might also discover that children who skip synagogue (or church) are doomed to the same fate, death by stoning.

The old testament is chock-full of misogyny and don’t get me started on the

genocides, infanticides and regicides that are completely justifiable because “God willed it”.

There are huge problems when you take parts of this book literally.

And here enclosed in brackets is what Jesus says about the subject of homosexuality (). Yup, that’s right, absolutely nothing! I find that somewhat instructive.

The conflict rears its head when the science-

appreciating liberals meet head-on with the literalists. I can’t see this ending with everyone agreeing. I’ve heard tale of one minister who is mostly just put off accepting homosexuals because he “doesn’t like to think about what they do”.

It was suggested to him that he should just stop trying to visualise it and move on. I bet there are members of the Church of Scotland who think the sky has fallen in on them this week. It may in fact be true of their roofs but that is another story.

I feel sad for them because their belief is genuine and they are reaching a crossroads, or feel as though they are. And so a split is looming in the not too distant future, possibly. Will there be an exodus of conservative evangelicals? That’s the big-money question right now.

We all understand that splits are painful things and for that reason I hope it can be avoided.

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STOP THE CUTS!

MAKE HISTORY ON 30 JUNE

by *Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace
organiser*

IT promises to be the biggest day of strike action in years.

It is the first big showdown between trade unions and the ConDem Coalition on the critical issue of public sector cuts.

With the active involvement of every enemy of cuts to jobs, benefits, services, pay and pensions, Thursday 30th June should make a bit of modern history, and help turn the tide of assaults by the rich on the rest of us.

At least 750,000 public sector workers - primarily in PCS and some teachers' unions - are balloting for strike action against the most savage cuts in several generations.

Unity in action is the key to stopping the slaughter - whether coming from Westminster, Holyrood or local councils, universities and Health Boards.

ConDems lash out in fear

The prospects for building even wider action capable of halting the butchery hangs on making 30th June the biggest possible strike and protest rally - taking the fight to a vicious but worried government.

The Tories and LibDem Yellow Tories certainly recognise the threat to their plans posed by 750,000 workers uniting, striking and hitting the streets simultaneously. That is the only explanation for their threats of even more dictatorial measures against the right of workers to strike, spewed out by the ever-so-sensible, ever-so-liberal Vince Cable, speaking at the GMB union conference (and why the hell was he invited there in the first place?!).



Reasons to revolt

There are countless reasons for united action.

£81 billion cuts by the Millionaire Butchers' coalition.

£9 billion cuts to benefits for the most vulnerable, sick and disabled, with rampant profiteering by outfits like ATOS, who are unfit to judge people's medical conditions, but well-rewarded for declaring up to 90 per cent of sick and disabled people fit for work.

Closure of courses in colleges and universities; cost-driven acts of vandalism.

Savage job losses across civil service departments - including **COMPULSORY** redundancies. Closure of DWP offices in many unemployment black-spots - who said irony was dead?

This at a time when official

figures reveal there are already nine people chasing after every single job vacancy in Scotland - rising to 31 in East Ayrshire, 30 in Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire... and all that before the wrecking ball of cuts demolishes tens of thousands more livelihoods.

Give our kids a chance

Anyone who has a heart would rage and organise for united strike action if they watched the BBC's recent documentary on child poverty. This national scandal was spoken of through the mouths of children living in damp-infested hellholes in the likes of Glasgow's Gorbals. Bright, articulate young kids suffering hunger and social isolation because their parents can't

provide the basics of life from their meagre benefits - which the government wants to slash back further.

A young generation condemned to slum housing, with one million houses unfit for human habitation across the UK in this day and age - whilst building workers are thrown on the scrapheap and welfare rights workers are buried beneath growing workloads as staff are cut, just as more and more people need their support to get what little they are entitled to.

Working class, even middle class people, from every walk of life, have plenty of reasons to revolt, either by striking on 30th June, or at least joining the lunch-time anti-cuts rally agreed by the strikers' main union, PCS.

Build beyond 30 June

The strike action could, and should, have been even more widespread. The leadership of the lecturers' UCU union dodged joining the strike on 30th, despite several rock-solid days of action against the cuts by these workers in recent months.

More unforgivably, the leadership of the main Scottish teachers' union, EIS, sold the membership 'a pup' in recent times, advising them to accept a £45m cuts deal from COSLA that includes a 47 per cent pay cut for supply teachers!

Now COSLA and the Scottish government have brutally applied the old adage: weakness invites aggression. They are demanding new, horrendous conditions that cut training time, marking and preparation times, lengthens the working week and working year, replacing holidays with training days – a catalogue of unprecedented attacks that has led to many EIS branches calling for strike action at the EIS conference, meeting at time of writing. And many EIS branches are also calling for united action alongside other public sector unions – precisely what is required to halt all governments from getting away with any cuts.

The bonfires lit by those who strike on 30 June could turn into

a raging inferno of resistance later in the year, when many other unions – including GMB, UNISON and UNITE – are talking of co-ordinated strikes against the cuts.

Pay and pension cuts

Two of the most generalised blitzes on working people – which lays the basis for generalised action in resistance – are a pay freeze across most of the public sector that is more like an Ice Age, given galloping inflation, and increases of from 50% to 300% in workers' pension contributions – for pensions that will be 20-50% less than now!

Gas and electricity bills are to rocket by up to 19 per cent, in a renewed orgy of profiteering by the power companies. Aside from underlining the case for public ownership of all energy suppliers, this highlights the need to resist pay cuts that are driving many workers down and down into despairing levels of poverty.

And the fact that the government's plans to hike employees' pension contributions to the tune of well over an extra day's pay being forked out every month, for drastically worse pensions and a longer working life, is incensing many to take action. United action. Strike action.

That is the simple lesson of

2005, when united strike action forced Blair's government to beat a hasty retreat on their plans to rip up public sector pensions – winning protection of pension rights for all existing civil service and NHS staff.

The pension robbers are back with a vengeance, so action on an even bigger, wider, more united scale across the public sector will be needed to beat them back.

Build for 30 June

Scottish Socialist Party members in the various unions are helping to campaign for resounding majorities for strike action on 30th in those unions balloting, but also campaigning for other unions and the STUC to unreservedly support the strike and build for massive workplace delegations to the Glasgow city-centre anti-cuts Rally on the day, using lunchtimes and flexi-time facilities to stand shoulder to shoulder with those braving the bloodcurdling threats of anti-strike legislation spewing out of government circles.

No cuts – make the rich pay!

Alongside other trade unionists, students and anti-capitalist protesters, we are helping to popularise the arguments against the need for any cuts whatsoever.

For taxation of the rich, not devastation for the rest of us. For public ownership of all major services, banks and industry, to use the fabulous wealth in Scotland to benefit the people of Scotland.

For a Scotland independent of the Westminster Butchers, independent of wars of imperialist aggression, independent of searing poverty for children and senior citizens alike.

For a socialist Scotland where the land is our land, the energy is the people's energy, the wealth we create is the wealth we share.

Build for a mass show of defiance on 30th June! Build the strike and the anti-cuts rally. Build the pressure not just on Westminster, but also on the SNP government, demanding they use their sweeping popular mandate to defy and resist Westminster's cuts. Demand that instead of begging for the power to tax big business only half the puny rate of Corporation Tax they already enjoy, that the SNP government should fight for the power to double Corporation Tax, back to pre-Thatcher levels – a demand that the SSP shares with the PCS union. The wealth is there – take it into the public's hands and use it to shelter Scotland from the storm of cuts.

“PCS members will be striking over being forced to pay an extra day's pay a month for a pension that will be 20 to 50 per cent worse than that on offer now.

The current average civil service pension is £4,200 – hardly gold-plated! But the Tories want to wipe that out.

If you are in a public sector union, your pension will be attacked in the same way. So support PCS members on 30 June. Ask your union rep what they are doing to fight this pensions onslaught.”

John Jamieson, PCS NEC

”BRITAIN'S nuclear weapons are to be privatised and taken over by Lockheed Martin, an American defence contractor. Navy buildings in Greenock are to close in

January. Now is the time to stand and fight for our jobs and communities that rely on the jobs. Come join the Rally in George Sq, Glasgow, at 12.30pm on 30th.”

John Lyons, MoD PCS group executive committee

”PEOPLE should join in our action on 30th because this is not just a battle faced by PCS and teachers' unions.

Planned cuts to the public sector will see over 1.3 million job losses, including 100,000 in the civil service. We're told public sector pensions are unaffordable. In 2010, £4.5 billion was spent on these pensions – but £10 billion was spent on tax relief for the richest 1 per cent in the country!

These are the worst attacks on jobs, welfare and pay we have ever faced. We must stand united against these cuts, united by our class and, most importantly, united by our willingness to fight back.”

A Glasgow JobCentrePlus PCS rep

“PUBLIC sector workers are paying for the reckless gambling of the banks. The members of PCS are being forced to take strike action to defend jobs, terms and conditions. I would urge every trade unionist and the general public to support those taking action.”

Jim Snell, branch officer, Glasgow City UNISON

"MY OPINIONS CAN BE DISCUSSED AND DEBATED, BUT THE FACTS CAN'T. THEY'RE INDISPUTABLE"

Alan McCombes talks to the Voice about his new book: *Downfall*

THE Defend Tommy Sheridan campaign hacks are throwing badly aimed mud, comments have had to be closed down on an English left website of ill-repute, and it's still the day before anyone will read Alan McCombes' book, *Downfall*.

The first book to be published looking at the Tommy Sheridan circus of disaster was bound to throw up a stour, so why has Alan chosen to step back in the mire as the author?

"Well, I didn't write it for the money," he says, laughing. The Defend Tommy Sheridan campaign have been in the press and online claiming Alan is "profiteering". Getting 8 per cent of the cover price, compared to the retailers' 50 per cent, authors need to be in JK Rowling's league before they make money which would cause eyebrows to raise.

"I know there's a lot of interest in this case, but that's largely in Scotland and the market's restricted. I've put a lot of time into this book, and at the end of it all, if I even end up recouping the equivalent of the minimum wage, I'll be quite happy.

"But I could have made a more lucrative living writing for other outlets. Or delivering pizzas, to be honest."

Downfall has been a long time coming, with numerous people suggesting Alan should write a book since 2006, and the outcome of Sheridan's first court case.

"After I stopped working for the SSP in 2007, I began to take



PHOTO: Allan Milligan

the idea of writing this book more seriously. I met with the publishers, Birlinn, who I was happy with because they didn't want a sensationalist book, they wanted a serious analysis that would bring out the story but would also allow me to bring out the politics of the events.

"When I signed the contract with Birlinn there was a police inquiry underway but nobody had been charged. Myself and a whole range of people in the SSP, and others outside the party, had given evidence to the Court of Session and were at that point being maligned the length and breadth of Scotland.

"We had lost all of our seats in the Scottish Parliament, and were being blamed for stitching Tommy up, for plotting against him, and for committing perjury to scupper

his court case. Tommy Sheridan was basking in the acclaim of having won his case, and had wholesale access to the media, which he used repeatedly to denounce honest men and women as liars and perjurers.

"We had come through a nightmare experience. We did the right thing, had refused to participate in a systematic cover up, yet we were being savaged and vilified.

"I was determined to bring out the full facts of the matter to the public because there is a public interest in this. The SSP during its peak years had thousands of people involved, giving up their time and money. It also, between one election and another, probably had up to 200,000 people voting for it. These people had a right to

know the truth. They were being lied to.

"Now obviously things have moved on. I wrote most of the book in 2008-2009, and I think that the most recent court case did mark a big change in people's attitudes. A lot of the facts were brought out at that case, and the verdict ensured that the media were finally prepared to acknowledge the case that we'd tried to make all along.

"But the book remains important because there's still huge confusion, not least because we still have clowns like the Defend Tommy Sheridan Campaign, who portray this as a miscarriage of justice and do a grave disservice to genuine victims of miscarriage of justice.

Portraying this individual who's lied and cheated and perjured his way through the last five years, as an honest man who's been framed up by his ex-colleagues and others is just nonsense, but it does cause confusion.

"This might be the first time that everyone gets an opportunity to have all the facts fully set out."

There may be fears amongst some that publishing a book now only serves to draw out the period in which the Scottish left seems to be at war with itself. The timing of publication was in the hands of publishers, who had a fair few legal issues to contend with, but regardless, Alan says, with the book he aims "to rectify the damage rather than dragging it out."

"I'd be more sympathetic to that argument if Tommy Sheridan had put his hands up, at any stage, and said, 'I accept responsibility, I accept that I maligned all these people,' and apologised. But Tommy hasn't done that, he still protests his innocence, he's taking this case to appeal. This individual has dragged out this calamitous series of events for more than six years, inflicted untold damage on the left in Scotland, from which it will take years to recover.

"I hope the book will, if enough people read it, actually repair some of the damage, by making it absolutely clear that this wasn't two warring tribes who were as much to blame as one another - I understand why people still think that. The boil needs to be lanced."

Back to why Alan would return to the firing line, having already endured a fair whack of trauma throughout this ridiculous drama. Couldn't he have left the book writing to others more detached?

"I'm not the only person who'd be placed to write this book, but I think I've got an advantage in that I worked very closely with Tommy for a period spanning more than 20 years. In some ways people might blame me for some of what's happened and I think that's fair enough, I accept responsibility, just as I accepted part of the credit when things were going well. I was involved from way back so I was able to put things in context, but I'm expressing my views and I make no bones about that.

"This is not a Scottish Socialist Party document, it's not a manifesto, it's not been collectively written. It is a personal account, and I don't try to pretend that I'm some kind of detached observer. I was a participant in the events.

"I think it strives to be fair to Tommy Sheridan, by acknowledging the role that he played. I think it tries to be fair

to other people as well by also at the same time illustrating that the successes on the left at that period were not purely down to the role of a single individual, but nonetheless it does give credit where credit is due."

Is he really in a position to be fair to Tommy Sheridan?

"I said I'd 'tried'! Hopefully it's a warts and all account. Where I've made mistakes, or where people in the SSP made mistakes, individually or collectively, I have tried to deal with that as well.

"People who took the right side in 2006, everybody who stood by the SSP at a time of great peril in 2006, deserves praise for the role that they played, but we made mistakes along the way. But these mistakes had reasons and I've tried to explain them, to put them in context."

So what will people who have followed the events learn from Alan's account? He stresses that he has not written an exposé, and there will be little in the way of juicy new gossip for the tabloids to chew. He was certainly at pains not to drag other people's personal lives into the Sheridan mud bath.

"What I have included is information which I was either personally involved in, so I know is true from first hand experience, or from interviewing people, which has been backed up and corroborated, or from documentation or from press archives. I have sourced carefully and I've tried to be scrupulous."

Downfall provides analysis as well as a narrative of events, and one thing that Alan is keen to challenge is the widely held view that this is the story of the actions of one man hell bent on a disastrous course of action.

"In the same way that it wasn't just one man that achieved the successes of the SSP, it wasn't just one man that brought about the serious

damage to the left in Scotland. If Tommy had been isolated, there is no way that he could have ruptured the left and inflicted the damage he did, or even have taken his case to court.

"But people backed him up - people inside the SSP, people who were not active in the SSP but were on the peripheries, he had celebrity backers, he had people in the media who were effectively cheering him on. Maybe some because they didn't understand, and he did manipulate people, certainly, but it required the active complicity of whole swathes of people and organisations, at different levels, all the way down the line, to allow Tommy to behave as he did."

With regards to how Sheridan behaved, Alan says he attempts, though he admits he feels ill-qualified, to look at the misogyny displayed throughout events surrounding the court cases, and the psychology at work.

"I think we tend to treat politics as parties, ideals and principles, which is what politics should be about. But everyone is a product of their own psychological make up, and that can have a massive impact. Although I think this story is unique, the cocktail of personality traits in Tommy Sheridan, that lead to the actions he took, I don't think they're that unusual. Or rather they are unusual but commonplace in some of the most powerful institutions in society.

"They're traits that are valued in the society we live in - individualism, egotism, ruthlessness, lack of remorse, being prepared to do anything without flinching. It's a jungle that we live in under capitalism, and those type of traits, often combined with charisma and grandiosity, I believe that mixture is quite prevalent, actually.

"I'm a Marxist so I'm not going to say that was the cause of the banking crisis, but I do think that the way that individuals behaved magnified the damage that was done.

Dictators are extreme examples, but in the boardrooms of big business I think you might find that Mr Murdoch and Mr Sheridan have a lot more in common than either of them would ever like to admit!

"It's important, because you do take people at face value, you tend to look for their strengths. It can blind you to behaviours that, when things start to go wrong, can become quite catastrophic."

Will the publication of *Downfall* mark the start of a new chapter for its author?

"I just hope the book might have an influence on those who even now have some illusions, who might read the book and question their own role, who might ask themselves if they would do the same thing again.

"You can work with people who you have political differences with, but you know where you stand with them. But how can you work with people who would argue that the sky is green and the grass is blue, and perpetrate a fantasy, and continue to buy into accusations against people which are not just unpleasant, they're monstrous."

As far as the bandied calls for unity, then, a line remains slashed in the sand.

"Obviously it's our story, the story of the people who stood by the SSP and told the truth. Whether people judge the book to be fair or not, they can read it and decide. But what they would have to accept is, this is no fiction. My opinions can be discussed and debated, but the facts can't. They're indisputable."

■ *Downfall is out now.*
Published by Birlinn Ltd.

PORTUGAL'S VOTERS SWING TO THE RIGHT

by *Raphie de Santos*

THE centre right were the main winners in June 5 Portuguese elections called after a vote of no confidence in the minority Socialist government over their handling of country's economic crisis.

There was also a setback for the Left Bloc, which was formed out of three small left wing parties and thousands of political activists, who saw it its vote almost halved to just over 5 per cent and losing 8 of its sixteen members of parliament.

The Democratic Unity Coalition's - a Communist/Green party block, known as the CDU - vote held steady at just under 8 per cent as it's loyal core stayed with it.

There was a big swing against the Socialist Party, which has been in government since 2005 and has overseen the decline of Portugal's economy prior to the onset of financial crisis in 2007. They had also been the deniers of any need for a bailout from the European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) until almost the eve of the bailout being announced.

Portugal's economic problems lie in it becoming uncompetitive when entering the Euro, a structurally weak economy supported by the public sector, high levels of corruption and being hit by the deepest recession since the 1930s.

The trend seen elsewhere in Europe - a move to the right to deal with the public debt with severe austerity measures - was repeated in Portugal with a big swing to the centre right Social Democratic (SD) party and a smaller one to the right-wing Peoples Party.

The SD is now promising even more austerity than the EU/IMF require for Portugal to



PEDRO PASSOS COELHO: leader of the centre-right SD

obtain its Euro 78billion bailout package.

The message seems to be that voters are looking for decisive action to the deal with public debt and looming bankruptcy.

The centre and left message, of smaller and slower cuts, does not seem as viable a solution to the majority of Portuguese voters as they look for solutions to this deep crisis.

The Left Bloc ratings in the opinion polls declined from the onset of the economic crisis in October 2010, when it stood at 12 per cent, compared to the vote it received at the election on June.

But the Bloc fought a spirited campaign, addressing

thousands of people the length and breadth of Portugal and putting forward radical proposals.

These included the renegotiating of the debt.

The formation of a national bank to fund investments.

The introduction of a public land programme to encourage organic co-operatives.

Protection for the unemployed.

The creation of more jobs for young people.

The setting up of a network of public libraries.

A program of energy efficiency.

The setting up of a national public railway service.

And the retention of water as a public service.

What is certain is that the austerity policies followed by the SD and the Peoples party will push Portugal into a deeper recession and follow the road of Greece and Ireland into a spiral of decline, deeper deficits, further bailouts and possible bankruptcy.

To deal with this crisis the Left Bloc will have to put forward even more decisive policies such as defaulting on the public debt and withdraw from the Euro and the EU.

But in the words of Left Bloc spokesperson Francisco Louca "it is the struggle which makes us stronger".

They will join with the already hundreds of thousands of workers who on November 2010 struck against austerity measures and the 300,000 young people who spontaneously marched for a future in March 2011.

Together they must stand up to what is now going to be an even more severe austerity attack and fight for alternative future.

■ *The views expressed are the author's own*

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LEFT VICTORY IN PERU

by Bill Bonnar

THE election of Ollanda Humala as President of Peru was marked by a steep fall in the value of the peso, a run on the stock market, an immediate decline in foreign investment and a flight of capital. The American ambassador stated that Peru had committed political suicide.

This shows what the forces of capitalism think of the new president. And they are right to take fright. The election of Humala is the latest indication of a pronounced move to the Left in Latin America over the past decade. What makes this result even more interesting is that the United States held up Peru as a successful alternative to the kind of progressive policies carried out in countries like Venezuela and Brazil; although obviously not successful enough.

For the Right in Peru and beyond Ollanda Humala is bad news. A 48 year old former army officer and son of a communist Labour lawyer he led an armed revolt against the former President Alberto Fujimoro in 2000. In 2005 he helped form the Peruvian Nationalist Party; a left of centre movement similar to others which have emerged in Latin America in recent years.

Humala is said to be personally close to Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia and is on record as a strong supporter of the Cuban Revolution. The party which he leads has a programme which calls for wealth redistribution, investment in health, education and social welfare, radical measures to combat poverty and a greater role for the state in the organising and management of the economy.



OLLANDA HUMALA

It argues for a new, more democratic constitution, for better rights for women and for greater protection for indigenous minorities. Similar to Bolivia it also embraces ambitious proposals for the protection of the environment and sees itself very much as part of the Bolivarian, pan Latin American movement.

The past decade has witnessed a dramatic upheaval in the politics of Latin America with the election of a succession of left of centre governments of which Peru is the latest. These range from social democratic governments as in Brazil to more overtly socialist governments as in Venezuela but whatever their differences they have a number of things in common.

The first is a total rejection of the kind of free market, neo-liberal policies which so devastated the economies of these countries in the eighties and nineties. In fact, so disastrous was this experience that the election of these governments can be seen as a direct political response to this period in history.

In contrast all these governments see the state as playing a key role in organising and protecting their economies. This ranges from outright nationalisation of key resources to stricter regulation of the

movement of capital to forcing multi-national companies to sign the kind of partnership agreements which would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

The second is a realisation that the deep seated social and economic problems of the region in terms of poverty, unemployment and inequality are basically structural in nature and will not be resolved by 'trickle down' economics or encouraging the rich to become even richer in the bizarre idea that this benefits everyone. Instead, active government intervention is needed. All these governments have adopted ambitious social programmes aimed at improving health and education, creating jobs, tackling poverty and reducing inequality. Some have even come up with the novel idea that the rich should actually pay some taxes to help pay for this. How successful these programmes will prove to be is a matter of debate given the still essentially capitalist nature of these economies yet the contrast with the approach of previous governments could not be more dramatic.

The third is a move towards much greater social, economic, political and military integration across Latin America and with it the rejection of United States domination of the region.

Whether it be direct military intervention, the organising of military coups, the destabilisation of 'unfriendly' governments or the inflicting of crazy economic theories; the United States has always seen this region as its backyard.

This is no longer the case. In 1973 the Allende Government in Chile was overthrown in a violent military coup; an event which had the United States fingerprints all over it. That government was a forerunner of the kinds of governments which have come to power in the past decade. Perhaps the main reason for its overthrow was its isolation.

With only two main allies, Cuba, which was itself very isolated and the Soviet Union, a continent away; it was surrounded by hostile states eager to do the bidding of their American paymasters. The likelihood of such a scenario now happening is remote as such governments would have strong regional allies. The then Secretary of State, Henri Kissinger, described Chile under President Allende as a rogue state. Yet today it would pro-American Columbia which would be cast in such a role.

For those of us old enough to have witnessed the overthrow of the Popular Unity Government in Chile, to watch the destruction of the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua at the hands of a mercenary army and to have seen an entire continent submerged under brutal dictatorships; the past decade has been exhilarating. Perhaps the boast of President Chavez that 'we will see socialism in our lifetime' is coming true.

I will leave the final comment to an email I received from a friend and comrade in Lima. It said simply; Victory.

TURN UP THE HEAT ON THE CONDEMS

by Ken Ferguson

AS support grows for mass industrial action in opposition to ConDem attacks on 30 June, their suave mask of reasonableness is slipping.

And as if often the case when confrontation looms the hard liners in the millionaires cabinet turn to their “moderate” liberal henchmen to wield the knife.

If Cameron and Osborne are the battleships of the Condem fleet bombarding jobs and services Clegg and Cable are crewing the sneaky submarines backing them up.

That tarnished saint Vince Cable, so recently the front man for British common sense, even surfaced to launch his torpedoes at the GMB conference threatening to tighten even further the UK’s draconian anti union laws.

And as Cable handed out threats to workers daring to resist his attacks his craven colleague Michael Moore lectured Scots voters on Westminster’s rules for an independence referendum.

Moore, who holds the largely ceremonial post of Scottish Secretary and only has his job because of the



lack of Tory MPs in North Britain, parroted the growing unionist chorus line’s latest attempt to block independence.

Speaking from his Scottish branch office - only recently occupied by anti cuts protesters - the hapless Moore warned that Scots would need to endorse independence two times before Westminster hauls down the Union Jack.

This unprecedented anti democratic doctrine it seems is uniquely necessary for the errant Scots in case they get it wrong the first time!

Like countless predecessors Moore confirmed the role of the Scottish Secretary as London’s man in Scotland not Scotland’s man in London.

However far from cowing the government’s opponents the duo only succeeded in pouring petrol on the flames.

Cable’s anti union threats came as the TUC published a report showing for many wages and living standards have been falling or static for 30 years as the crisis causing fat cats lapped their

ill gotten cream.

They sparked a chorus of defiance which ca’n only increase support for the 30 June actions.

Given that the Scottish LibDem MSPs are now rarer than Ospreys, Moore’s “two votes” demand - backed by some dusty academics - was met with a deserved chorus of derision.

All this confirms the growing fear behind the Cameron smirk that as the brutal reality behind the “equal sacrifice” lie is revealed, resistance will grow.

Equally, for those in the ConDems’ firing line this fear must be seen as a clear sign that victory can be won and act as a spur to action both industrial and political to defeat Westminster and Edinburgh attacks.

A year after “I agree with Nick” and the Downing Street Rose garden love in battle is increasingly joined to defend jobs and service and to advance democracy.

For the left and the Scottish Socialists the battle for a democratic republic and the fight for jobs and living standards are two sides of the same coin and the fight is now on for both.



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