

Scottish Socialist VOICE



INSIDE THIS
ISSUE

Pages 2
Action needed
NOW to stop
Fuel Poverty
deaths!


Pages 6&7
Workers show
power in
action

£1 ISSUE 386 9TH DECEMBER 2011 - 12TH JANUARY 2012

A SCOTTISH SOCIALIST PARTY PUBLICATION

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

KEEP BUILDING THE FIGHT AGAINST THE CUTS!



Make 2012 a year of defiance!

FIGHTBACK SPREADS BEYOND PUBLIC SECTOR

by Pete Murray

IF you poke a sleeping giant in the eye, you are bound to get a reaction. It'll be angry, you can be certain of that. It will also be unpredictable.

30 November has demonstrated the greater force of acting together and has given militants in every union much greater confidence to argue for wider action.

The fact that 30 November happened at all means that it may now be easier to stir the leadership of each of those 30 plus unions to organise for another mass strike in January.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka has successfully argued for the heads of these unions to meet a fortnight after the strike to agree on their next steps.

He says: "The government must start negotiating about public sector workers' pensions, not about how our members have to lose benefits to pay off a deficit they had no part in creating."

The government has shown no sign so far of preparing to change its position – preferring instead to stick to the line that pensions are unaffordable, unless of course, they happen to be the pensions of government ministers such as Francis Maude.

A key component of maintaining the confidence of tens of thousands of union reps in Scotland for further action over pensions will be momentum.

To find that, we can look beyond the public sector.

As the *Voice* went to press, hundreds of electricians from across Scotland were due to converge in a mass picket of the headquarters outside Glasgow of the construction company, Balfour Beatty.

It is the latest action in a four-month campaign organised by



PHOTO: Craig Maclean

rank and file activists against new contracts which will cost the sparks 35 per cent pay cuts if they are implemented.

Unite believes the new so-called BESNA system will also destroy safety and skill levels under agreements which have applied across the sector for four decades – and which Balfours and six other rogue employers intend to tear up.

On Saturday 2 December scores of sparks and supporters marched through Glasgow city centre, defying the rain and police, to occupy a construction site operated by NG Bailey – one of the seven breakaway companies.

The sparks have been enraged by Balfour's threat of a court challenge to Unite's ballot which say 81 per cent support for strike action.

"They can challenge our ballot through the courts if they like," Unite's regional organiser Rab Sherry told me on UnionNews, "But the rank and file members within this union are still prepared to fight."

Had the ballot not been withdrawn, strikes at four Balfour Beatty

sites were due to take place on 7 December.

Unite is now re-balloting, and expecting an even larger majority in favour of a strike. The union also plans to ballot members at two other construction companies.

Rank and file organisers were delighted with the ballot result.

They say it proved their case to the Unite leadership that it was possible to organise and mobilise among skilled, itinerant workers in an area where sub-contracting and sub-sub-contracting is rife and where the long, dark shadow of years of blacklisting deters many from even joining a trade union, let alone speaking out in the workplace.

It is a key industrial battleground, which has seen the union leadership shaken awake by the strength of feeling among the rank and file and a fast-growing sense of anger among members against the employers.

Those members say – correctly – that the construction firms all have full order books and are running operating profits in the tens of millions, even in the depths of a recession.

The seven breakaway companies complain that they cannot get loans from bonus-bloated bankers who prefer to hoard their cash rather than invest it, therefore they must freeze and drive down electricians' wages and the wages of scaffolders, heating engineers and plumbers.

Those workers are flatly refusing to accept these terms – and if it is possible to mobilise

this group of workers, it should be possible to mobilise many more, in news areas.

So, it is significant that Unite has announced it is opening membership to unemployed workers, students and community activists for the first time.

Other unions have taken similar steps.

The TSSA has appointed community organisers to work with commuter and public transport lobby groups.

Unite's predecessor the TGWU played a role in campaigning with largely faith-based community groups during the London Living Wage campaign.

More recently, the STUC focussed much of its preparations for the People First march on October 1st on bringing faith groups, disability campaigns and groups such as the "Save the Accord" under the umbrella (which was sorely needed on the day, of course!) into the organisation of the march.

Unite believes the community membership scheme will help link union activists with groups involved in campaigning to save local public services.

Unite general secretary, Len McCluskey said: "This scheme could transform trade unionism in the UK. It comes at a time when horrific cuts and ideological social changes are pushing more and more people to the margins.

"It is time now for those on the margins to organise, to come together to challenge the decisions made by the elite in the interests of the few. This is the real Big Society - ordinary people organising for themselves - in action."

■ *Pete Murray is co-editor of Union-News*
<http://union-news.co.uk/>

ACTION NEEDED NOW TO STOP FUEL POVERTY DEATHS

by Ann Lynch.
Campaign 250

MILLIONS of pensioners would have been baffled last week to find out their winter fuel allowance was cut by £50 for the over 60 age group and £100 for the over 80's.

This was despite the fact that both Westminster and Holyrood have said they would do all they can to minimise fuel poverty, this winter.

Even the Warm Homes Allowance, which the government put pressure on the fuel companies to introduce, will not be paid into accounts till 32 March 2012. And five out of the big six companies have said this pitiful allowance, will be paid 'on a first come, first served basis'!

Only British Gas is giving this allowance to all their customers who apply for it.

The big six are raking in profits, with the last available figures being £8 billion made in 2010. With the 19 per cent increase coming through in the next bills, their profits are set to soar.

Privatisation was the hallmark of the Thatcher era which saw millions of job losses and huge profits for the companies. When electricity was privatised in 1986, the trades unions made sure legislation was in place to protect the most vulnerable from disconnection.

It was illegal to disconnect the electricity from certain vulnerable groups, during the four coldest months - from November until February.

Those with children under



five, the disabled community and the over 60's were all protected from being disconnected in those cold months. The electricity companies then introduced 'pre-payment cards' which means you actually disconnect yourself, if you run out of money. Last year's figures indicated that 5 million people in the UK were on pre-payment meters, with an estimated 1,000 more folk going on them every week.

The Campaign 250 group was set up 2 years ago with two main aims: for an eradication of pre-payment meters, and for the National Winter Fuel Allowance of £250, currently paid to all over 60's, to be extended to all vulnerable groups who are under 60. Extreme fuel poverty is rising fast, with people spending an estimated 20 per cent of their income on gas and electricity.

Recent figures indicate, for those on benefits, this has risen to 35 per cent of their income on fuel bills. This is a disgrace and would not be tolerated in any other oil rich country.

Last winter, some 400 people per day were phoning the Energy Action lines

worried about fuel bills, and wanting advice on free insulation.

Alex Neil (SNP) had said that 30 per cent of those who had called would be considered for an assistance package.

Yet his own government, has now cut the funds available for household insulation from £71 million down to £49 million. Added to this, the SNP have shamefully abandoned its 2007 commitment to eradicate fuel poverty by 2015.

A recent report on fuel poverty deaths makes shocking reading.

In 2009, almost 20,000 people died from cold related deaths. In 2010, this had risen to 24,400 deaths. And, according to research done by Professor John Hills, Director of Centre for Social Exclusion, this is estimated to rise to 27,000 by the end of this winter.

That means an estimated 72,000 people will have died in three years due to not being able to heat their homes.

Truly shocking.

The government knows these deaths are preventable, yet just blames the big six. We

all know that certain cancers are preventable, we have adverts and lots of publicity to remind us to go for screening, early detection and so on. We also know that early detection does in fact save lives, yet the government is prepared to see another 27,000 people die of something that could be stopped by the stroke of a pen.

The National Winter Fuel Allowance must be extended to all vulnerable groups, THIS WINTER.

We must make sure all homes are properly insulated. A debate has to take place re an alternative to the disgusting pre-payment meters. In the longer term, electricity and gas must be taken back to where they belong, back into the public sector.

Pre-payment meters cause instant disconnection.

The customer is given access to an emergency £5 top-up. When this £5 top-up is used, you are cut-off.

This means the most vulnerable in our society are left with no access to heating, lights, cooking, and anything else associated with electricity use.

This is unacceptable in the 21st century. Scotland has an abundance of natural resources, including oil, gas, water and electricity.

We have so much, we export to other countries. Privatisation has become a vulture on our resources.

The profits of the big six, are obscene. In the longer-term, we must return gas and electricity, back into public ownership, so that no-one is ever left freezing at home again.

WHERE NOW FOR THE LEFT?

by Colin Fox

LAST weeks strike by two million public sector workers was not only a magnificent display of resistance to Government attacks on their pensions it was also a sign of things to come.

On the same day as Britain saw the biggest strike in a generation the Institute of Fiscal Studies [IFS] published its annual report. It revealed that last year working people suffered the sharpest decline in their living standards since World War 2.

And the IFS warned the 3.5 per cent fall in 2009/10 is likely to be followed by an even steeper decline next year. There's is not an isolated opinion.

'The Item Club' for example, an economic unit backed by the accountancy giants Ernst and Young, now predicts the jobs market in Britain will take a decade to recover from this downturn. Using the Treasury's own economic model they show that Scotland has lost £40billion, or 5.9 per cent, of its output since 2009.

And it's not difficult to see how this economic deterioration manifests itself in the lives of working people. Newspaper headlines deliver the same message day after day:

- 'Home finances fall for 40 per cent of households as debt levels rise and incomes fall'

The Scotsman

- 'Fuel poverty reaches 40 per cent' reports The Guardian.

- 'Home repossessions warning' notes The Herald.

- 'Families hit hard by inflation rise' says The Times.

- 'House prices set to lose quarter of their value' warns the BBC.

If, as Karl Marx suggested,



'conditions determine consciousness' then the question is how is the economic collapse impacting on the political conclusions of working people?

For a decade the SSP promoted our socialist case amidst a capitalist economic boom, one historically prolonged by cheap borrowing. Our message, based on replacing capitalist profiteering and social inequalities with a plan of production and the redistribution of wealth, was often scoffed at.

However, the deterioration in living standards means people are re-assessing our message and re-examining the neo-liberal ideology of New Labour and the SNP upon whom they had previously placed their bets. More and more people are concluding that it is not them as individuals who are to blame for unemployment, high inflation, falling wages, lower pensions and widening impoverishment, it is the oppressive economic system they live under.

And they are right.

The 10,000 public sector staff who gathered outside the Scottish Parliament not only booed the ConDem Government for its three-pronged assault on their pensions, they also booed the SNP Government for its

complicity in the cuts and for crossing Parliamentary picket lines.

Six months earlier Alex Salmond paraded on the very same turf after his Holyrood election success and there can be little doubt a majority of the crowd booing him on 30 November voted SNP back then.

SNP strategists will have shivered at the sound of voices, so recently in harmony with theirs, were now booing so readily. Similar displays were witnessed in Glasgow, Dundee, Inverness, Aberdeen, St Andrews, Motherwell and several other towns across Scotland.

This is a constituency the independence movement has to win over in the forthcoming referendum to have any chance of success. Many in the wider Independence movement recognise the crucial role the SSP can play in winning over the working class vote for Independence when the referendum is finally held.

The SSP has responded positively to these new political opportunities.

Above all we aim to inspire millions of Scots to fight for the socialist alternative to neo-liberal warmongering offered by the four parties of big business. 30 November is a sign of things to come because it

shows again what the working class movement is capable of.

The SSP has been at the forefront of opposition to public sector cuts and to the steep rise in gas and electricity bills. We are enormously heartened by the response we have received. We are convinced there is an unmistakably fierce and widespread determination to resist Tory attacks igniting Scottish politics.

The SSP remains committed to building a mass socialist party in Scotland. That's precisely what working people need if they are to defend their living standards from attack in the next period. We have a proud record and a coherent programme to present.

We see the task of building up that potent political force with principled socialist convictions and an iron determination to succeed as central. Many people across Scotland are now looking for a political alternative and a coherent explanation of why things have changed so dramatically in recent years.

Our presence in the trade union movement, in local community campaigns and on local Councils can provide just such a socialist alternative as we champion the case for defying the cuts and reaching out to others in building a political force capable of improving the lives of this generation and the next.

Our Executive recently announced plans to step up our campaign against fuel poverty – an issue which has now become people's number one concern. We also discussed the progress we have made in aiming to contest May's local Council elections and ensure the alternative to the cuts is widely seen and heard.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SNP'S 'CHAMPIONS'?

by Campbell Martin

AS we head towards a new year, it's worth taking a small glance back at 2011.

For those of us involved in politics, 2011 will forever be remembered as the year when a pro-independence party won a majority of seats in the Scottish Parliament, and by doing so confounded the entire electoral system put in place by British unionists.

We will also remember 2011 for the increasing levels of poverty being inflicted on Scots by a London-based government for which we did not vote.

When we put those two issues together, we clearly see why devolution continues to fail Scotland.

In 2010 we had an SNP Government in Edinburgh, albeit one without an overall majority – that momentous achievement was still a year away in the future.

By most accounts the SNP administration at Holyrood had been relatively sure-footed, yet when Scots were asked to vote in a UK General Election, it seems many of our fellow citizens fell for the well-worn Labour Party line that 'you have to vote Labour to keep the Tories out'.

Of course, the reality is that every person in Scotland could vote Labour, but if England votes Tory, then we will have a Tory Government imposed on us.

Scotland fell for the Labour lie – again. We elected 41 Labour MPs out of 59. Scotland voted Labour 'to keep the Tories out', but while our nation remains part of the British Union, it is the electors of England who will decide which party governs Scotland from London, a



CHAMPIONS? SNP's Holyrood MSPs

situation that screams 'democratic deficit'.

At the UK Election, Scotland trusted Labour to protect us from the Tories, but the 41 Labour MPs we sent to Westminster are British unionists. They accept Scotland will be governed by whichever party or parties England elects, and so they settled down on the benches of the loyal opposition, as the Tories unleashed the most savage cuts to public spending since the 1930s.

A year later – after twelve-months of a slashing Tory-LibDem Government – Scotland went to the polls again: this time to elect a Scottish Government.

With no chance of the Tories winning this election, Labour couldn't use its contrick of 'vote Labour to keep the Tories out'. This time it was the SNP who trotted-out its own well-worn electoral lines, telling us we should 'Elect SNP Champions' who would 'Stand Up For Scotland'.

They promised us they would protect Scotland from the worst excesses of a Westminster, Tory-LibDem

Government intent on punishing the poor and forcing us to pay the debts of millionaire bankers and financial speculators.

People that had never before voted SNP put their faith in Alex Salmond and gave the Nationalists their best-ever election result.

The SNP was returned with a parliamentary majority, and Scots expectantly looked towards Salmond and his team of 'champions' to 'stand up for Scotland'.

Sadly, like their Labour counterparts at Westminster, SNP MSPs quickly showed they had no stomach for a fight. When Westminster told the SNP Scottish Government that its funding would be slashed by £1.3 billion, Finance Secretary John Swinney meekly tugged his forelock, accepted the cut and passed it on to councils up and down the country.

In terms of the proposed independence referendum, Salmond has rightly told Westminster to keep its nose out of Scotland's business, pointing out the Tory-LibDem Government has no

mandate in Scotland.

However, when it comes to Scots being impoverished by Tory-LibDem spending cuts, the SNP 'champions' bend the knee and accept Westminster's sovereignty over our country.

Thankfully, though, despite twice being let-down by the politicians we elected, the confidence of the Scottish people appears to be growing. The latest Scottish Social Attitudes Survey shows the tide of public opinion is flowing towards a pro-independence position.

More and more Scots are realising that Scotland as a region of the United Kingdom cannot be protected from having Tory governments imposed on us, if that is how England votes.

It is also now clear that, within the constraints of devolution, an SNP Government in Edinburgh, even with an overall majority in parliament, is not prepared to stand up to Westminster.

If we want a situation where Scotland will never again have a Tory Government imposed on us, and where the Scottish Government has full sovereign powers, then we have to vote for independence.

Having said that, for those of us in the Scottish Socialist Party, 2012 has to be the year we make clear there is no point in securing independence for Scotland, only to remake our country along the lines of the failed, British capitalist model.

The SNP, in an independent Scotland, would be cutting public spending as deeply as the Tories. It's for us to expose that fact, and to make the positive case for an independent, Scottish socialist republic.

WORKERS SHOW POWER IN ACTION

by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

“I’LL remember this day for the rest of my life!”

So said Steven, a UNISON steward in Glasgow’s museums, as we marched with about 20,000 others to Glasgow’s Barrowlands on 30 November.

He has that in common with over 300,000 people across Scotland, up to 3million UK-wide, who made N30 the biggest single day of strike action since the momentous 1926 General Strike.

In Scotland, 180,000 council workers went on strike; 50,000 NHS staff; tens of thousands of teachers and civil servants. Tens of thousands marched to rallies in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Inverness, Motherwell, Paisley, Glenrothes, St Andrews, Dumfries, and a host of other towns and cities.

It was a massive display of the indispensable role of the working class in the production of vital services and goods – and the power of workers to challenge the government.

Picket-line Avenue

The morning of N30 was a spectacle to behold, music to anyone who wants to change the world to a better, fairer place. It was picket lines everywhere: every corner, every side of hospital buildings, council offices and depots, civil service offices, schools, colleges, universities, police HQs... every area of the public sector.

On several streets, you could see the multiple flags



and banners of several different unions on two or three other picket lines from the one you were standing on. The sense of unity and strength was palpable.

The numbers on picket lines were massively larger than usual. Fifty or more at many hospital gates (despite the ruthless intimidation meted out to NHS workers by senior management on the eve of the strike); dozens at college, university and civil service buildings that are well accustomed to strike action against axe-wielding Tory and Labour governments in recent years.

The success in getting workers to honour the strike was phenomenal. A PCS officer getting reports on her phone from all over Scotland told me it was over 95 per cent out on strike; in some buildings we visited to show the SSP’s solidarity, it was 97 per cent. Only 33 schools out of 2,700 in the whole of Scotland were open!

“This was about everything”

It was about brutal attacks on workers’ pensions – being asked to pay more, for longer, for lesser pensions – but it was about far more. As a council worker in Paisley remarked to me the next day, “This was about everything, the whole lot. We’ve had enough – and I hope this doesn’t turn out to be a one-day wonder.”

A nurse at Glasgow’s Western Infirmary perhaps captured best the thoughts and feelings behind the decision by 3 million workers to lose a day’s pay.

“I was out on strike in 1982, never since. I’ve brought my young teenage daughter with me on the picket so she can understand what this is about.” A woman who was gentle in manner, polite, probably not in the habit of swearing, then almost whispered to me, “This is against everything the government is

doing to us. They are pissing on us from a great height.”

Decisive, united strike action raised millions of other working class people off their knees. Rather than condemn the strikers, as Tories and LibDems tried to incite them to do, thousands of shoppers stood on every street corner and road junction, applauding the marching strikers, shouting their encouragement, making the hair stand on the back of your neck with the sense of workers’ solidarity.

A political strike

Sneering millionaire Cameron tried to dismiss the strike as “a damp squib”. He’s not even kidding himself! He and his Cabinet know this was a powerfully political strike; not party political, but clearly and resolutely anti-government.

Many chanted “Tories Out” as they marched. The SNP MSPs were booed at the Edinburgh rally for

crossing picket lines to conduct 'business as usual' in the Scottish parliament. Labour MSPs desperately sought to be seen on the marches – especially those competing for the Scottish Labour leader's post! But strikers booed at mention of the hypocrisy of Labour MPs crossing Westminster pickets and the Labour leadership refusing to support the strike,

Fury fuelled by inequality

The strikers' political awareness has been fuelled by rage at the bankers; fury at the revelations that Britain has the most rapidly growing inequality of any advanced country; anger at the rank lies from the government about there being 'no money', whilst company directors have average pensions of £175,000 – after pocketing pay rises of a mind-boggling 4,000 per cent since 1980!

Far from being 'a damp squib' the potent cocktail of pay freezes, rocketing prices for essentials like food and fuel, and savage job losses exploded into this mass strike.

Many – probably a huge majority – had never been on strike before.

Women were there in vast numbers, which is hardly surprising, given they make up over 75 per cent of public sector workers, but also given the Institute of Fiscal Studies' report showing they face 75 per cent of the cuts to pay, benefits and pensions in Osborne's plans.

War declared by Osborne

Osborne's Autumn Statement on the eve of the strike demonstrated the callous determination of the ConDems to forge ahead with cuts, and with attacks

on workers' rights that not even the hate-figure Thatcher dared implement.

Their answer to rocketing unemployment is to make it far easier to sack workers! They want to make it almost impossible to vote for strike action. They plan to charge workers £1,000 for an Employment Tribunal hearing against unfair dismissal – and only then if they've been in the job for two years, rather than the current one year. Their Sackers' Charter combined with two more years of horrendous austerity inflamed tens of thousands of workers who might not otherwise have bothered to actually picket their workplace.

Further strike days

One of the most common remarks from strikers was "I'm afraid we'll have to be out again". Not with reckless enthusiasm for losing more days' pay – but a steely determination to see this fight through to victory, recognising that although N30 has rattled the Butchers' government, it will take further strikes and protests to force them to abandon their savage cuts.

To their credit, the leadership of the civil service union, PCS, shares that understanding and has initiated a mid-December summit of union leaders to discuss the next steps.

Resist divide and rule

One of the oldest dirty tricks in the book is 'divide and rule'. The union leaderships need to guard against government attempts to reach shoddy compromises on specific pension schemes. In a sense there is nothing to negotiate; the increased pension contributions being

demand of workers has nothing to do with filling gaps in pension schemes, many of which are in vast surplus (£2billion in the black in the case of the NHS scheme). This is theft of workers' wages, a double taxation, to bail out the bankers and the growing deficit exacerbated by the government's cuts programme.

No delay – name the day

Timing is of the essence. Hot on the heels of the most dramatic display of the power of the awakening giant of the trade union movement, workers and communities need a swift follow-up, to keep chasing the millionaires' Cabinet – and to pound the SNP government with demands to 'stand up for Scotland' instead of meekly passing on Westminster's cuts.

The SNP MSPs and Ministers who criticised Osborne's declaration of war on the working class lamentably failed to side with 300,000 workers and their allies when they stood up to the Twin Tory bullies. Instead, John Swinney told Newsnight Scotland that the one per cent cap on public sector pay for two years after the current pay freeze "seemed about right"!

Demand Defiance – not destruction

In January and early February, the Scottish government and local councils will finalise their budgets. That is when workers' organised power should be wielded – alongside communities, students, pensioners, disabled people and the unemployed – in a one-day or two-day mass strike, with tens of thousands mobilised to lobby the parliament and

council buildings.

The STUC and public sector unions should popularise the unifying slogan "No cuts – tax the rich", and demand that councillors and MSPs set No-Cuts Defiance budgets, instead of cravenly kow-towing to the dictatorship of Cameron and Clegg's Coalition. These millionaires have no mandate to rule and ruin Scotland; there are more Pandas in Scotland than Tory MPs!

For socialist independence from the Butchers

N30 was historic. But it would be criminal if any union leaders made it into an exercise in letting off steam. Instead, they should harness the energy and fury expressed by workers into a powerful motor for social change, with a further united national strike in early New Year.

Union members – those who joined the pickets and demos – should bombard union leaders with calls for this swift follow-up blow to the governments that seek to make workers pay for a crisis of capitalism.

And in fighting back against the cuts, thousands will see the sense of a socialist case against all cuts – for taxation of the rich and democratic public ownership of the banks, big business, services and energy resources – putting people before profit.

They will increasingly support the SSP's call for independence from the Westminster Butchers – but not so that Salmond and Swinney can wrap cuts in the Saltire instead. For a cuts-free, poverty-free, independent socialist Scotland; that's what we need to re-double our efforts towards in 2012.

WE'RE NOT ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

by Sandra Webster

DESPITE their protestations there are some things the Westminster and Scottish government seem to agree on. For me it is the use of their glib disneyfied phrases like "We're all in this together" to exhort us to embrace the need to cut essential services.

These are a lifeline to the most vulnerable members of Scottish society.

I'm a parent carer to two children with additional support needs. I am part of an invisible army of carers who provide high quality care to those we love. It is estimated that we save the Scottish economy ten billion pounds a year.

That's the equivalent budget of the whole of the NHS.



Like many of my caring comrades I am finding more and more services which used to be described as being "essential" being eroded.

Day centres and respite units are being closed. Local hospital services under threat .

This means less opportunity for a much needed break or even a few hours to be able to relax without worrying about the well being of those we care for

As centres are being closed families are offered

"personalisation" budgets to pay directly for their own care.

This sounds utopian but in areas where it is being piloted, some families report massive cuts in existing care packages.

It is being used as a tool of a cuts agenda. The administration of brokering your own care can be yet another stress which many

people are reluctant to undertake.

Social work teams where colleagues know the needs of the families they work with are being dismantled. Staff are being encouraged to "hot desk" not have a designated workplace but even work from home.

Clerical staff are being replaced by Blackberry phones and clients are encouraged to contact a worker directly.

For many vulnerable people this is contributing greatly to the high levels of stress they are already living with.

Front line services ensure our caring role is much easier. If family situations do break down care packages are very costly not only in human terms but financially too. As the cuts are beginning to affect more and more I worry what the impact will be in the near future.

For many of us we wanted to believe that front line services would be protected. We thought the cuts would affect other people but we are waking up to the devastating affects in our own lives.

We realise as carers that We are not all in this together and we are among the hardest hit.

The cuts are hitting us all from cradle to grave from the needs of the young to our oldest citizens who were promised a welfare state. A safety net of protection.

This social contract is being dismantled and more and more is being demanded of us as carers. Something must give. My fear is it will be the personal tragedies of many individuals and families who just can't continue will these be reported? The SSP is the only party to offer an alternative. I hope our voices will be listened too.

Scottish Socialist Voice Subscriptions

Fill in this form and send to: Scottish Socialist Voice,
Suite 370, 93 Hope St, Glasgow, G2 6LD Or telephone us:
0781 1265388

Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to
Scottish Socialist Voice

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Phones.....

email.....

I've enclosed: n £5 for 5 issues n £10 for 10 issues n £20 for 20 issues

Solidarity rate: n £6 for 5 issues n £12 for 10 issues n £24 for 20 issues

The Wee Red Bookshop

Books, t-shirts,
ideas to change the world!

All at very reasonable
prices!

137 London Road, Glasgow

Phone 0141 221 7470 for opening info,
or if you can donate books,
we can arrange for them to be picked up.

THAT JOKE ISN'T FUNNY ANYMORE



YOU may not know this, though you may have guessed, but I am pretty well known as a bit of a thicko.

Ask the cognoscenti about this and the cognoscenti reply, as one and in sorrow but without dissent: “thicker than a whale omelette”.

There are better educated onions out there and there are queer sticky things that live in dead trees that can beat me at *University Challenge*, where my idea of competing is to shout “Vaughan Williams” during music rounds and “Turner” at every other question in the hope that I get lucky.

Incidentally, this normally bags me a couple of points, even though my knowledge of these people extends to a vague notion that the former may have composed the theme tune to *Eastenders* and the fairly certain conviction that the latter was Hooch’s partner in that film.

And what a good film it was.

Can never remember who was the bloke and who was the dog though. I don’t think the film makers did enough to make it clear. More exposition needed there, I’d say.

So, intellectual titan I am not, but I am aware of this and where there is even the dullest spark of sentience, there is

hope. I do what many do in my position: I try to read books. Or rather, I plan to read books.

I’ve got a pretty impressive planned reading list. Honestly, you’d think I was quite the brainbox if you saw it.

But something always gets in the way. Yes, there’s children. I actually did manage to finish one or two books before I somehow cashed in my biological chips, but like many parents, I’m either too tired or too drunk to make much headway through the pages these days.

There’s something more insidious lurking in my house though, stopping me reading books, something even more insidious than a child. And it’s in your house too.

Yes, there it is, in the corner of your living room, and it’s tuned to *Abnormal Animal Genitals With Ross Kemp*.

The telly. It’s got you by the face and you can’t move. Ross Kemp’s just furrowed his brows with a concern that (who knows) may conceal arousal whilst an alleged scientist pokes the willy of a sedated Dik-Dik with a biro and, like Ross, you can’t look away.

Now, I’m not down on the telly, it’s maybe our greatest achievement as a species and will remain such till Ginsters’ pie boffins invent a Cornish pastie that doesn’t go soggy in the microwave, though I suspect we may have to wait till socialism raises humanity to a higher plane and completes our mastery of science till we resolve that one.

No, I’m not down on the telly. In fact, I’m all for it. And it can be educational. There are many landmark series which have both entertained and expanded minds - one need only cite Jacob Bronowski’s *The Ascent Of Man*, Kenneth Clark’s *Civilisation*, David



JIMMY CARR: a right twock!

Attenborough’s *Life On Earth* and Tim Wonnacott’s *Bargain Hunt* and you get the idea.

But mostly it’s shite. And I don’t really have a problem with that either. I can sit through endless episodes of *How They Made It: Giant Mechanical Post-Apocalyptic Spiders* or *When Goalkeepers Shit Themselves* and I don’t feel it’s doing me, or society, much harm, even if it’s stopping me reading books.

Comb back through the above though, if you can bear it, and you’ll notice the word ‘insidious’. There is, I believe, real insidiousness afoot, something which represents an assault on cherished human values like solidarity and compassion.

Now, I’m not going to go on about *Top Gear* here. That was always a right wing, Cupids-style glory-hole, a tedious hour of three men laughing at famine.

I’m talking about your so-called ‘edgy’ comedians, the likes of Jimmy Carr, Frankie Boyle and Ricky Gervais, the lazy playground nihilists, the

ones whose ‘dark’ humour is so out there and extreme and challenging that they can’t stop getting their ugly mugs on the telly, like the true outsiders they are.

They’re insidious because their reactionary agendas are dressed in idiotic anti-establishment ribbons, but they challenge nothing other than the right of the vulnerable to defence and, in effect, they shore up capitalism’s prevailing ideology of cruelty.

And suddenly, if you don’t find jokes about Down’s Syndrome kids funny, you’re either not ‘getting it’ or are a fusty Whitehousean moraliser.

On the left, we’ve often been accused of being humourless, and to combat that I cite *Squalidity* ppbs and the phrase ‘deep entryism’.

But really, if you find Jimmy Carr laughing at gang rape hilarious, then maybe you should turn the telly off, pick up a book and batter yourself on the face with it till your eyeballs fall into your lap.

Thick I may be, but at least I’m not a complete prick.

WHY I JOINED THE SCOTTISH SOCIALIST PARTY

OVER the next few issues the *Voice* will carry a series of articles with several new members of the Scottish Socialist Party asking them why they have joined the party. We begin with **Paolo Caserta** from Edinburgh. He spoke to **Colin Fox**.

Paolo Caserta is 34. He works as a support worker for people with learning difficulties. He is also studying for his Masters Degree in Public Policy and Management at the University of Glasgow. He lives in Leith and joined the SSP two months ago.

Hello Paolo good to see you again, first of all tell us a little about yourself.

"I am from a small village outside Naples. I came to Scotland 7 years ago to improve my English and I planned to stay here only a couple of months. It was my intention to return to Italy where I had studied political science at University in Naples."

What made you chose Edinburgh and how did you find Scotland?

"I have family friends here. I expected Edinburgh to be cold and wet. But boy, I mean I knew it wasn't the Caribbean I was visiting, but not that cold and wet! I arrived here February 2004. But I must also say I expected to find the Scottish people also rather cold, detached and distant and that has not been my experience. I have found people here very warm and welcoming and kind on the whole so that was a pleasant surprise. I fell in love with



PAOLO AND COLIN

the city and I am happy here. I also found Edinburgh much more multi-cultural than Naples for example and I like that."

Had you been active in politics before you came to Scotland?

"Yes. For example my father was the local Chair of the Communist Party in my village. And my grandfather was active in the agricultural workers union in Campania. I grew up with politics widely discussed in my family. Both of them would say 'there is lots of things wrong with Italian society and it needs to be changed.' In my village I was known, not as Paolo, but as 'the son of the Communist guy'."

"And after school I went to University in Naples to study political science. I wanted to understand the mechanism of democracy and how it operated. Naples had a strong left wing and I got involved in the 'no to globalisation' movement. I must say I was not satisfied with it because they did not seem to know what they we against far less what they were for."

"The left in Italy is for me very frustrating. Although strong it was never a 'con-

structive opposition'."

'Constructive opposition'? How do you mean?

"Well for me it didn't try to win real reforms for working people. I mean for example the SSP tried to get free school meals and free prescriptions and things like that but it seemed to me the left in Italy was more interested in posturing, happier in opposition and even afraid of winning. For me Berlusconi only got elected because the left was in complete disarray and lacked any clear sense of direction. The same thing happened with Mussolini in the 1920's."

"The left has been set back hugely in Italy."

But it might be argued the left has been 'set back' in several countries. You might have heard for example of the SSP's difficulties over the past 7 or 8 years while you have been here!

"Yes, but with all due respect this is really nothing compared to the collapse of the Italian left. I mean I really respect the SSP for the stand it took in refusing to lie for Sheridan. For me that was an honourable posi-

tion which I am sorry to say would never have happened in Italy. There is no comparable integrity in politics there. Certainly not."

So what made you decide to get involved in politics here in Scotland?

"As I said before I had not planned to be here very long but you know how one thing leads to another. I had been here a few years and felt settled here. I had been interested in politics but only in 2010 did I decide it was time to get active. I wanted to give something back to Scotland as the people and the country had been good to me."

And why did you choose the SSP?

"Well of course I belong on the Left. I could see no attraction in the Labour Party or the SNP. I had seen you many times on Princes Street shouting about Afghanistan and fuel poverty. I really admired the SSP for that. I mean you are a small party with no elected MP's yet you are active on the street and show such a 'hands on' approach always trying to involve the people. I like that very much. The SSP is the only party I see doing anything about those kind of issues and in such an open and democratic way, you know what I mean. I was very impressed at the way the SSP spoke to and on behalf of the ordinary people. I think petitioning is very democratic. No one else seems to give a damn about the poor in Scotland."

So how did you go

about joining the party?

"I knew that you were there every weekend, every Friday and Saturday on Princes Street. I saw you there many many times and I decided I would make it clear I wanted to join and get involved."

And how has being in the SSP compared to what you thought it would be like?

"I wasn't sure what to expect to be honest. But I find the SSP very positive despite what has happened, and serious. I enjoy the way we discuss issues of importance to people like me. It is a more relaxed atmosphere than I experienced in the PCI. But, if I can be constructive too. I think it is time to step up campaigning on issues like gas and electricity and get the power companies to justify themselves a lot more. Lets not accept the situation so much."

The SSP also need to write more pamphlets on issues like Independence. I want us to take more of a lead in the Independence movement."

And since you joined the party you have been at all the branch meetings and on the street stalls.

"Yes. I want to be fully involved in the party. Obviously I work shifts and that means I cant be at all the meetings."

"I am a Unison member too so I want to get more involved in the SSP's union work and I want to write for the *Voice*. I am serious about politics and I am looking forward to being part of the SSP's future success."

IRANIANS MUST DECIDE IRAN'S FUTURE

by Bill Bonnar

THE build up is now familiar. A propaganda offensive to paint the country as a threat to both its own people and the wider region; a campaign of diplomatic isolation, the pursuance of sanctions and the establishment of an agenda in which 'nothing is off the table'.

It is not a timetable for war but rather the creation of a scenario making that option possible if needed. Fresh from the 'liberation' of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya the West is now targeted Iran for regime change. All that is lacking is President Reagan's gallery of rogue states.

Of course, this is not how it looks from Iran.

There the mood is one of a country under attack from enemy forces out to destroy their government and return Iran to the fold with a compliant pro-western regime who would hand over the resources of the country and turn Iran into a neo-colony.

This is certainly the view, not only of the regime but also of most of the opposition groups. Some might say that this is far fetched and a result of propaganda yet it accurately reflects what has happened in the modern history of the country.

In 1951, the Iranian Parliament, headed by Prime Minister Mossaddeq, passed a series of measures including the nationalisation of the mostly British owned oil industry.

This led to the following; a massive international propaganda campaign aimed at isolating the country and portraying its elected government a threat to



regional security, sanctions aimed at the destabilisation of the country and covert support for opposition groups.

In 1952 the American CIA instigated a military coup which overthrew the legitimate government and installed an American puppet, King Pahlavi as Shah of Iran. With no apparent sense of irony, Prime Minister Mossaddeq was tried and found guilty of treason.

The oil companies were de-nationalised with compensation paid to the former owners for their inconvenience, all democratic institutions were shut down, the influential Tudeh Party (communist) was banned and suffered severe repression and the country locked into an economic and military alliance with the West.

The dictatorship of the Shah lasted until 1979 until overthrown by the Islamic Revolution which brought the current government into power.

At this point it is worth noting that the Shah and his American backers were so afraid of the threat from the Left that every effort was made to destroy the socialist

opposition which in turn meant that the principle opposition remaining was Islamic in character which in turn shaped the nature of the anti-Shah revolution of 1979.

In Iran today there is intense conflict between forces with different visions of the way forward. This is essentially a battle between secularism and theocracy and has existed throughout the modern history of the country. Between those who want to consolidate Iran's status as an Islamic State and those battling to defend and extend democracy.

This came to a head during the last Presidential elections narrowly won by President Ahmadinejad; a result which showed a society highly polarised. This division has been seized upon by the United States who sense an opportunity to yet again interfere in the affairs of the country and reverse the defeat of 1979.

Their excuse is Iran's alleged nuclear weapon's programme. Leaving aside the fact that Iran's near neighbour, Israel is armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons and has been threatening aggression against Iran for years which would give the country every

excuse to acquire its own nuclear weapons; there is no actual evidence that Iran is going down this road.

It has a nuclear power programme which at some stage in the future could be switched to the production of nuclear weapons; but that can be said of any country which has such a programme.

For the United States it is clear that this 'threat' is being used as the excuse for aggression. As for the claim that they want to assist the democratic elements in Iran this is greeted with derision by all sides in the country who well remember the 'democratic credential' of the last US sponsored government.

As stated earlier there is a struggle going on in Iran. A democratic movement is challenging the authority of the religious establishment to be the final arbiters of Iranian society.

It is around civil rights versus the autonomy of security forces, the rights of women, the subversion of the democratic process by religious institutions; all against the background of deteriorating social and economic circumstances and the kind of policies necessary to tackle these issues in the interests of the people rather than in the interests of a rich elite.

Whatever the outcome, it is for the Iranian people to decide their future; not Washington, London or Tel Aviv.

Our solidarity should be with Iran in its struggle against western aggression; to reject the propaganda offensive now being waged and to expose the real war mongers and aggressors in this situation.

CONDEMS LOOK FEARFULLY TOWARDS 2012

by Ken Ferguson

FOLLOWING the massive support for the N30 strike wave Tory toff Cameron's bluster about it being a "damp squib" simply serves to highlight the fear growing in the heart of his class war cabinet.

Behind the contradictory claim that the strikes cost half a billion pounds but nobody much supported them this is a government which may have planned a five year term but whose hold on power is under pressure.

That's why former New Labour luminary turned Condem hired gun, Lord Hutton, was wheeled out to justify the attacks on pensions as really rather generous.

His honeyed words fell on deaf ears and drew a prompt rejection from union leaders.

Then almost in the same breath different bits of the government sang different songs on the crisis with one tune from Cameron and another from Clegg.

Hard cop Cameron spotlighted his backing for clipping public sector union wings by ending facility time for union activists to deal with members in employers time - a nasty class war approach worthy of this



millionaire son of Thatcher.

In contrast the now massively discredited Clegg - remember the sunny distant days of "I agree with Nick?— sought to regain his people's friend image.

Wringing his hands about those poor old public sector workers having to "do all the heavy lifting" he flew a rather flimsy kite about curbing bonuses and taking action on top people's pay.

Class war from Cameron is entirely credible but the idea that Clegg can persuade the coalition to bite the hand that feeds them and seriously take on the rich really is Santa Clause country.

The truth is that N30 was the opening shot in what will

be a bitter battle with a wounded and increasingly isolated government.

The sunshine talk about the wonders of the market providing jobs to sacked public sector workers and leading a grateful nation to a land of milk and money are junked just as surely as the junk bonds that caused the crisis.

Now the prospect offered by the Condem is unemployment, pay cuts, and rising prices stretching well beyond the next election with all the dire prospects that raises for their survival.

An increasingly angry public, faced with this dismal prospect, are going to be hard to convince of the

increasingly questionable "we are all in it together" fable at the heart of the Condem case.

For the left and the Labour movement the year ahead is both a moment of maximum opportunity and of considerable danger.

It goes without saying that the British ruling class is the most experienced in the capitalist world with centuries of divide and rule experience from splitting colonised peoples in their empire to splitting workers unity now.

In the months ahead therefore the need is to broaden and deepen the forces and demands opposing the millionaires plan to pay for the crisis with slashed benefits, sackings, price hikes and pay cuts.

As the bosses move to pick off opponents with concessions for some and stone walling for others the left will need, as never before, to win the case for unity against the central Condem aim to make workers pay for the bankers crisis.

Defeating this central Condem objective is a indispensable requirement if the way to a sustainable alternative society which puts people before profit by taxing the rich to pay for their own crisis is to be achieved.



Join the Scottish Socialist Party

Fill in this form and send to: SSP, Suite 370, 4th Floor, 93 Hope St, Glasgow, G2 6LD

Or see our website:

scottishsocialistparty.org

Or telephone us:

0781 1265388

- I would like to join the Scottish Socialist Party
- I would also like to join Scottish Socialist Youth
- I would like more information on the Scottish Socialist Party

Name.....

Address.....

Phones.....

email.....