



Scottish Socialist VOICE

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**FOR AN
INDEPENDENT
SOCIALIST
SCOTLAND!**

Build for a YES vote!

BIG BUSINESS PARTIES IN DISARRAY

by Ken Ferguson

BEHIND the largely manufactured media rows between the ConDems and their opponents one hard fact stands out as the curtain rises on 2012.

They are all desperately facing the reality that their much vaunted market system is in disarray, discredited by the banker's greed and a squeezed public's steadily growing anger.

That is what lies behind all the froth about a "new" kind of capitalism, "tough" measures on the eye watering mega bucks paid out in the fat cats bonus merry go round all wrapped in a misty sugar coating of "fairness".

Unfortunately the Santa Clause season is over and all the brave talk of reform is just that - hot air.

Back in the everyday real world the ConDems are involved in an increasingly frantic drive to sell their assault on pensions as fair in the teeth of a gathering wave of rejection from public sector workers.

Meanwhile they are pushing on with their sackings, cuts and pay freezes, suitably presented as unfortunate but unavoidable and, of course truly regrettable.

Faced with such a picture



JIM MURPHY: cheerleader for cuts

surely the alternative government, the Labour Party, must be moving decisively to put the ConDem cutters to the sword halting the cuts, and sackings unfreezing wages?

Not exactly.

Amidst a laughable media blitz to portray Ed Miliband as an incompetent red his response was to warn voters that tax funded services aiding the poor were a thing of the past. As an alternative he offered soft focus, woolly call for a "caring" capitalism.

He then went on to allow himself to be described as a "man of steel" apparently unaware of the more famous previous holder of the title one Joseph Stalin.

For those in any doubt about what the means the ever quotable right wing MP for Eastwood Jim Murphy was on hand to explain.

In the pages of the house organ of New Labour the *Guardian* the shadow War minister explained that Labour would have to accept much of the ConDem cuts programme if it was to have "credibility".

That this was hailed as a revelation says more about the sleepiness of the so called politics correspondents in London and Edinburgh than Mr Murphy's "revelation".

The reality is that both the ConDems and Labour are in large measure agreed about the need for cuts and sackings to save the failed neo liberalism which is now laying waste to jobs, services and communities so Murphy's remarks added little that was new.

However as politicians increasingly abandon any pretence that they are prepared to do anything to control the speculators other than feed their insatiable appetites for more money, stunts and spin increasingly take centre stage.

In place of policy, manufactured rows about Twitter and soft soap about "getting tough" with top peoples' pay and bonuses are offered as a parliamentary X factor.

In Scotland this is supplemented by synthetic "debates" over independence and grave "experts"

pronouncements on who has the power to do what when and where.

It is indeed revealing that the Cameron coalition chose as a venue for debating Scotland's future the Hand Ball arena at the London Olympic village and that despite its spin all the stunt did was spotlight London's determination to hang on to Scotland.

Elsewhere in this *Voice* we look at this latest imperial manoeuvre in some detail but there can be no doubt that it again gives the lie to unionist's claims that Scotland is a basket case needing London crutches.

In fact it is London that is desperate to keep its grip on Scotland's wealth, natural resources oil and population for recruitment to foreign wars.

What now confronts an increasingly angry people is the fact that forced to choose between peoples needs' and bosses greed mainstream politicians choose the bosses every time.

However in the resistance over pensions here and against the banker's austerity, in the occupy movement and in a myriad of other ways an alternative is emerging.

In Scotland the message is that the twin goals of breaking with the failed capitalist market madness and the warmongering British state are two indispensable sides of the same coin.

Independence on a socialist model is indeed the only choice capable of breaking the fetters binding us to people and planet trashing policies of exploitation and war at the rotten heart of the British state.

The iron is hot and the vital job for the Left in 2012 is to fashion to a new just shape.

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REJECTED TORIES CAN'T IMPOSE WILL ON SCOTLAND

by Campbell Martin

AS part of the independence movement, one of the challenges faced by the SSP is persuading a majority of our fellow citizens to vote for Scotland to retake the status of a normal independent nation.

The last poll of 2011 showed the tide of public opinion beginning to flow towards independence, and the first days of 2012 brought more good news. David Cameron, the Tory Prime Minister of the United

Kingdom – a man whose party has no mandate in Scotland and only one MP – decided to interfere in the proposed Independence Referendum by telling Scots that if the SNP didn't get a move on, the London-based UK Government would impose a date for the vote and decide what the question should be.

Cameron's intervention was the perfect example of Scotland's subservient position within the British Union. The people of Scotland elected an SNP Government, with a majority in parliament and a manifesto commitment to hold an Independence Referendum in 2014 or 2015, but a Tory politician in London saw fit to over-rule the democratic decision of the Scottish electorate and tell us what we should do instead. Cameron, like his hero Thatcher, treats the Scots with contempt.

It is for the people of Scotland to determine our constitutional future, not a coalition of Tory and Liberal Democrat politicians rejected by Scots at the ballot box. On that point the independence movement is united, but there are other significant issues where differences of opinion exist.

The SSP is the political party most clearly in support of re-establishing our country as a



normal independent nation, with the full powers necessary to govern ourselves at home and represent ourselves on the world stage.

While the SNP talks of a multi-option referendum and possibly giving tacit support to 'fiscal autonomy' or 'devolution max', the SSP is wholly committed to securing for Scotland the full sovereign powers required to radically transform Scottish society and deliver a better, fairer country for all of our citizens.

Be under no illusions; in its campaign to retain control of Scotland's wealth the British establishment will use every imaginable lie, smear, distortion of reality and dirty trick.

The independence movement in Scotland must counter this onslaught by setting-out the benefits and merits of retaking political control of our own country, and the SSP must be prepared to rise to the challenge of leading the fight for Scotland's future. We have the people, we have the policies and we have the determination to succeed. We should place no limits on the role the SSP can play in securing our country's independence.

As a party once again growing in numbers, we must also rise to the challenge over the next 12 months of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with members of our local communities. Every one of us knows how savage cuts being imposed by the Tory-LibDem UK Government, the SNP Scottish Government and

Council administrations are devastating towns, communities, families and individuals.

Across Scotland the SSP has been campaigning on our socialist alternative to the cuts – we should be taxing the rich, forcing the bankers, company directors and corporations to pay their fair share – and in 2012 we must build on our commitment to fight-back against the capitalist politicians who put the interests of millionaires and billionaires before those of men, women and children in our local communities.

Part of the fight-back against the parties of the right – Tory, SNP, Labour, Liberal Democrat – will see SSP members representing the party and local people by standing in May's Council Elections. Electing socialist councillors will give local communities a real voice in Council Chambers, a voice

prepared to say 'No Cuts' and prepared to propose budgets to meet the needs of local people, instead of slashing services and sacking workers simply to generate 'savings' that are then redirected by central government to pay debts accrued by spivs and speculators in privately-owned banks and financial institutions.

We won't deliver independence or establish a socialist Scotland by securing SSP councillors in May, but we can use the elections to show there is a political party on the side of the people. Our campaigns in May give us the opportunity to present our alternative vision of a country and local communities where the interests of ordinary men, women and children take precedence over the right-wing political dogma of parties funded by millionaires.

The Scottish Socialist Party has nothing to fear from the challenges we face in 2012. We are a party that has emerged from a dark period; we are a party growing in numbers and strength; we are a party articulating the needs of the people.

We are also a party that will not tolerate Tories attempting to impose their will on Scotland

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NEW SCOTS LABOUR LEADER A PRISONER OF UNIONISM

by John McAllion

JOHANN Lamont is Scottish Labour's sixth leader since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. Unlike her predecessors, she leads all of her Party in Scotland – MPs, MSPs, councillors and party activists alike. She heads a Party that is now more fully devolved from UK rule than at any time since 1999.

UK Labour leader Ed Miliband, describes her as having inherited a leadership position that carries with it the “weight and authority of the whole Party in Scotland”. According to him, this new and powerful position equips her to revive Scottish Labour's fortunes and to challenge the SNP'.

She herself has promised to initiate a process of internal renewal that will reach out to include those who have never before thought of themselves as being Labour as well as reaching back into lost Labour communities. She promises to make Labour Scotland's Party again.

Of course, any political party recovering from an historic electoral defeat believes it must talk up its prospects of recovery. However, coming from an as yet untested Party leadership these are brave words that border on the foolhardy.

Since the dawn of devolution, Labour in Scotland has been in persistent political and electoral decline. With each successive election to the Scottish Parliament, the Party has lost seats, constituency and list votes.

Overall since 1999, they have lost a third of the parliamentary seats they originally held, more than 100,000 list voters and more than 40,000 constituency voters. The 2011 election



JOHANN LAMONT

marked the worst defeat in Scottish Labour's history. An already parlous electoral position is made more difficult for Scottish Labour by the looming independence referendum that for now remains under the control of a buoyant and majority SNP Government.

Labour, as the largest unionist party in Scotland, will be expected to lead the campaign for a No vote. This is where the complications begin.

Will it form a broad campaign with the other unionist parties or will it stay politically well clear of the Tories and LibDems? If it is to be the former, Scottish Labour runs the risk of being contaminated by association with the parties of the hated Coalition Government in Westminster. If it is to be the latter, it runs the risk of splitting the NO campaign.

Already the Party's spokespeople find themselves trying to dodge questions about sharing platforms with the Tories while effectively supporting the Coalition's line on an early referendum with a single question.

Without wishing it, they are forced onto the same political ground as some of the most reactionary hate figures in Scotland today.

Political predicaments of this kind can only increase as the referendum campaign gathers pace. Yet, even more

potentially dangerous political pitfalls lie ahead for Scottish Labour. In a rare display of unity at the end of December, Labour MSPs joined with their SNP counterparts to refuse the necessary legislative consent to Westminster's current proposals for welfare reform.

While this opposition was largely token (the reforms will go ahead in Scotland as elsewhere in the UK), it afforded Labour MSPs the opportunity to claim that they were on the side of the angels and opposed to the Coalition's attacks on the poor.

During the Scottish Parliament's debates on the reforms, Labour's Jackie Baillie promised to stand shoulder to shoulder with anyone against the Coalition Government's welfare reform agenda that targeted cuts on pensioners, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

She highlighted her opposition to changes to housing benefit that threatened more than 60,000 Scottish tenants with cuts that averaged £40 per month per tenant.

Unfortunately for her and for the other Labour MSPs, all of them support a devolution settlement that allows Westminster to impose such reactionary changes.

Even more unfortunately, Liam Byrne MP, Labour's Westminster spokesperson on welfare reform, is far from

sharing Labour MSP's anti-cuts stance. In a recent speech spun as a “radical rethink of the welfare state”, he let it be known that a future Labour Government would pursue an equally tough line on welfare.

The housing benefit bill was “simply too high”. Too generous benefits were skewing the behaviour of the long-term unemployed whom, he implied, were happy to coast along on unearned income. Labour would no longer support the undeserving poor, only those who “work hard and do the right thing”.

Without consulting the Scottish Party or its new “powerful” leader, the Labour leadership in London had begun to move their Party closer to the Coalition Government's position on welfare reform. The anti-cuts stance of Scottish Labour had effectively been undermined. So too was any idea that Scottish Labour policy on reserved issues could be any different from that of London Labour. The new fully devolved Labour Party remains incapable of defending Scotland on the big policy issues of the day.

Johann Lamont has therefore inherited a Party that is in long-term electoral decline. She leads a Party with no coherent position on the independence referendum. On paper, she may be the nominal leader of Scotland's 41 Scottish Labour MP's. In reality, the Westminster MPs continue to call the shots on the big policy issues of the day.

Arguably, she is in a weaker position politically than any of her five predecessors.

Devolution simply isn't working for unionism's largest Scottish Party. It is now up to the socialist and nationalist Left in Scotland to exploit that weakness.

YOUTH BUILD AGAINST THE CUTS

by Andy Bowden

IT'S been a pretty grim year for youth in the UK - over a million unemployed, an increase of £9,000 fees for universities, and demonised in the press as rioters or workshy scroungers.

Next year doesn't look too great either; the Tories have already begun removing a raft of workplace rights - including access to tribunals on unfair dismissal - and a floating the idea of removing the minimum wage for young people, as well as making them work for their benefits, ie as ultra low paid labour in the run up to Christmas for Britain's retail sector.

It's not been universal doom and gloom though - 2011 saw the longest student occupation in recent times, a six months holding of Glasgow University's Hetherington House in protest to cuts to courses at the University.

This occupation was such a threat to the University's unaccountable and incompetent establishment, they took the unprecedented step of calling in police to evict the occupiers. A small army of Strathclyde's finest -



complete with two vans and a helicopter - succeeding in evicting a small group of overnight occupiers after a few hours, but this wasn't the end of the story.

Watching the scene in disgust were a few hundred students, who then promptly decided to take their displeasure to the Principal of the University, Anton Muscatelli.

Unfortunately Muscatelli couldn't be found - but the protesters were able to move the occupation from the Hetherington to the University's Senate building in the same day. In a state of panic - and much to the annoyance of the right-wing on Glasgow Uni campus - the University offered the

occupiers the use of the Hetherington in exchange for leaving the Senate.

It was a humiliating climb down, made worse by the University's recent inquiry into the eviction which found it was illegal.

This campaign on campus was unsuccessful in saving all the courses, but it did manage to save some - such as nursing - from the axe. Many more would have been cut if the student movement had not shown it's willingness to fight and win against the University.

Out of this occupation has come another, different in scale victory - it's meant that the anti-cuts movement across Glasgow and radicals have networked and now have more of an idea of what each

campaign is doing across the city.

This network has been formalised in the Coalition of Resistance - an anti cuts campaign which has been going for over six months, and is made up overwhelmingly of young people.

CoR has been successful in providing strike buses for both the 30 June and 30 November strike actions, giving additional confidence to strikers that it's not just those long in the tooth who care about pensions.

As we're about to enter a next year of austerity - one that is planned to last until 2017 according to some financial commentators - we can say with confidence that the anti-cuts movement in Glasgow, particularly that which involves young people, is in a stronger position than it was this time last year.

The Hetherington Occupation showed us that it is possible to light a fire under unaccountable management and Coalition of Resistance has given us a formal structure to unite the young people who want to fight the cuts with trade unions and community campaigners.

PEOPLE'S TRIBUTE TO BURNS

POLITICS and humour are very much the order of the day at this year's Edinburgh People's Festival Burns supper on Saturday 28th January. The Scottish Parliament's Deputy Presiding Officer Elaine Smith, MSP, will speak in celebration of 'the radical life and legacy' of

Scotland's national bard and will be joined by the musical review 'Playing Politics'.

People's Festival spokesman Colin Fox told us:

"We are delighted Elaine Smith has agreed to deliver this years tribute to Robert Burns. For almost two decades now we have

hosted this unique celebration of Burns's radical contribution to Scottish life. And for 2012 we have a fabulous night in store because as well hearing the Deputy Presiding Officer outline her views on Burns' life and legacy we also have the inimitable musical comedy

review team 'Playing Politics' with Vic Rodrick and Annie Gunner Logan. It promises to be quite a night but with space limited I'd advise people to get their tickets as soon as possible."

■ *The People's Festival Burns supper starts at*

7.30pm on Saturday 28 January in The Canon's Gait, Edinburgh. Tickets priced £10 and £7unwaged - include haggis, neeps and tatties - and are available via the People's Festival website at www.edinburghpeoplesfestival.org.

NO RETREAT ON CUTS FIGHT

by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

THE experiences of 2011 and prospects in 2012 for working class people can be captured in one phrase: grim - and grimmer!

Food bills, domestic fuel, transport costs and daily essentials rocket as wages are frozen.

The sick, disabled and unemployed are hounded and demonised with threats of withdrawal of their measly benefits unless they find jobs that don't exist.

One in three Scottish children officially lives in poverty, with an appalling 52 per cent of kids in north Glasgow.

Meantime the richest 10 per cent of the population are on average £100,000 better off than they were in 2005.

Things can only get worse!

All this mayhem and exploitation even before the Coalition's fangs sink into jobs, incomes and services, as they have only just begun to do.

Last year 24,000 Scottish public sector jobs were lost; forecasts abound of 100,000 more to go in the next year or so.

In response workers and communities have increasingly joined the resistance, challenging the axe-wielders with quiet fury, protests, and strikes. The most spectacular display of working class resistance in several decades was the November 30 strike by over 2million public sector workers.

Crossroads

That battle is now at a critical crossroads, and the outcome will heavily



influence workers' conditions for years to come.

As the SSP warned in advance, the Tory/LibDem have used every dirty trick to try and derail a movement that, behind the smug arrogance, terrifies them.

On the eve of the historic N30 strike, Cameron & Co offered fake concessions, and tried to isolate strikers from the rest of society.

That, and their hard-faced announcement of even deeper cuts in Osborne's Autumn Statement literally the day before, only hardened the resolve of workers and strengthened the strike.

Cameron then tried to demoralise strikers by dismissing it as "a damp squib", but in the face of the derision and anger this provoked, had to then admit it was "a big strike".

By taking united, militant action, the unions attracted 100,000 new members in the period of the St Andrews Day showdown;

confirmation that decisive action builds unions as powerful weapons of resistance to the millionaires' butchery.

Then the government resorted to an age-old strategy; they sought to use the most right-wing, spineless 'leaders' of the TUC and individual unions to undermine the momentum and unity of workers taking action.

Right-wing treachery

Ten days after the biggest show of workers' power in generations, the TUC's Brendan Barber, GMB leaders and fake-radical UNISON leader Dave Prentis argued for acceptance of the government's allegedly 'new and final offer'.

In fact, as PCS union general secretary Mark Serwotka rightly said in point blank refusing to accept this deal, there is nothing new about it. It is a minutely-adjusted version of

what was on offer prior to N30.

Coalition Minister Danny Alexander subsequently boasted to the parliament that their 'new' offer did not involve a single penny less in 'savings' than their pre-N30 proposals. It is merely a rearrangement of the misery, with crude attempts to divide and conquer the millions of workers who had displayed such magnificent determination to fight the cuts.

Triple whammy remains

The three-headed assault on pensions – workers paying more, for longer, for lesser pensions - remains at the heart of this latest offer. It still seeks to double-tax public sector workers - not to improve the pension schemes but to fill some of the hole in government funds caused by the bankers' bailout and the recession that has been exacerbated by the ConDem cuts.

To their eternal shame, some UNISON leaders, keen to get back to their quiet lives, undisturbed by outbursts of action by hard-pressed members, blurted out the cynical opinion “this was always going to be a damage limitation exercise”!

Not exactly the views of the pickets on N30!

The spineless posture of more right-wing union leaders gave the government the opening to issue a monumental lie through the media at the height of the holiday period; that a deal had been reached.

This, alongside repeated assertions that the pension plans were going ahead regardless from April 2012, was designed to browbeat workers into surrendering. For good measure, the union that has spearheaded the battle in the wider movement - the PCS - was excluded from the so-called negotiations: an attempt to isolate them and a back-handed compliment to this socialist-led union's success in inspiring others to join the fray.

Socialist alternative critical in unions

The craven readiness of union leaders like UNISON's Prentis and GMB to cave in after the momentous scale of action by millions underlines the dangerous pitfalls of accepting the idea of ANY cuts – and the need for socialist union leaderships.

Echoing Labour (and SNP!) talk of the cuts being “too deep and too soon”, these union leaders lack a vision of measures that make ALL cuts entirely unnecessary, and so they are outrageously willing to capitulate in the face of a government that puts on a hard face. It is no accident that PCS especially have been firm in opposition to

this deal; they have rejected the case for any cuts, calling for taxation measures and investment in jobs instead. The political viewpoint of unions becomes critical in determining what kind of fight they put up.

But when the Tory and LibDem boot boys looked to the TUC right wing for salvation, they reckoned without the furious resistance of union activists and members, who lobbied their leaderships with demands to not sell out their pension right.

A whole succession of union leaderships has rejected the deal: PCS from day one; the teachers' unions NUT and NASUWT; POA: university and college lecturers' UCU; UNITE sectoral committees in both the NHS and local government.

But the united front against the cuts has been seriously breached by the decision of UNISON to accept the ‘Heads of Agreement’ – the framework for talks - thereby suspending further industrial action for at least the short-term. The national leadership's surrender pre-Xmas did enough to confuse and undermine the confidence of delegates to their sectoral committees. But UNISON members should still bombard their leaderships with demands that unless the attacks on pensions are withdrawn during the negotiations alongside other unions who have rejected this shoddy package.

Now is the time to fight, not flee

In a remarkable confirmation that now is the time to escalate the fight against an enfeebled government, the doctors' BMA has announced plans to consult 130,000 members in

what could be their first industrial action in 40 years.

As the Voice goes to press, the TUC Public Sector Liaison Group meets. Union members who have fought to save the deferred pensions are demanding that they name the day without delay for further, united strike action.

Despite UNISON leadership's weakening of the united front, the other public sector unions should forge ahead with further united strike action – as PCS, NUT, UCU and UNITE appear to be committed to. The Scottish TUC should join forces and give a lead on this, in stark contrast to the role of the TUC.

Call another one-day strike

Such a day of action could also involve sections of private sector workers, increasingly up in arms at cuts to their own pension schemes, wages and jobs. For instance, UNITE members in the construction industry, battling and balloting for strike action against mind-boggling 35 per cent cuts in their wages; Unilever workers taking their first ever strike action against abolition of their final salary pension scheme by the giant multi-national with a previous reputation for ‘paternalism’, high quality tied houses for their workers, model villages, etc.

In rejecting the government's not-so-new deal, the UCU called for another one-day strike before university half-term holidays in mid-February. Time is of the essence. Another mass strike could include lobbies of council buildings, as councillors throughout the land set budgets, with demands that instead of wielding the knife on behalf of their paymasters in

Westminster and Holyrood, they should set ‘No Cuts’ Defiance budgets, and help build mass movements that demand back the stolen £millions from central government, to save every job, wage and service.

Demand defiance – not destruction

An immediate mass strike of public sector (and sections of private sector) workers could pound the SNP government with the demand that they stand up for Scotland, for services, for social justice - instead of Swinney and Salmond aping the Tories with their pay cuts, service cuts and job losses.

The unions are pivotal to the battle against cut and leaders have a duty to lead, not surrender at the first threat of retaliation by the Tory bullies.

This will require further, united, national strikes and demonstrations, which would embolden workers, communities and students not even in a union to join the resistance to all aspects of cuts.

Unions need socialism

And at the heart of all this lies the need to boldly advocate an alternative that explodes the myths that cuts are necessary or unavoidable. The Scottish Socialist Party has consistently broadcast the case for taxation of the rich and big business, and democratic public ownership, as the core of a socialist alternative. At this critical moments the socialist case against all cuts is the difference between confusion, division, and acceptance of very slightly lesser cuts - or unity, confidence and a sustained struggle that can defeat the attacks.

IRONING OUT THE POLITICS

The Iron Lady, directed by Phyllida Lloyd. Out now.

by Kevin Leetion

PHYLLIDA Lloyd's Thatcher biopic *The Iron Lady* seems to have divided opinion amongst film critics and appears to have been met with varying degrees of disapproval across the political spectrum. Some on the right have referred to it as 'a left-wing fantasy' while some opponents have described it a hagiography.

The former is palpable nonsense, but the latter is also not entirely fair.

Such a divergence of views would be surprising were it not for two factors.

The first is that the protagonist (or rather the person on whom it's supposedly based) is alive and the memories of her time in office and its destructive impact remain with many of those that were affected.

Secondly, is the decision by Clark and scriptwriter Abi Morgan to effectively suck the polemical politics from her story.

By taking away what made her loved by some and reviled by others might have been an attempt to maximise its appeal but has had the effect of displeasing many.

The very mention of her name elicits a response and it is ultimately impossible for people to leave their politics and personal experiences at the ticket office.

That said, there are valid artistic reasons for trying to focus on a more personal approach.

The film is set in the modern day, with a physically weak Thatcher (played convincingly by



MERYL STREEP: with her Thatcherism light

Meryl Streep) struggling with mental illness and the loss of her husband.

Her career is told through a series of flashbacks almost as if they are being viewed through the prism of her own, faltering, memory.

This allows you to excuse the portrayals of her opponents (whether they are Richard E Grant's Heseltine, boisterous Labour MPs, or snobby constituency party Tories) which otherwise might seem excessive.

Instead the object of the film apparently is to focus on the loss of her political, mental and physical power, by comparing the elderly figure with the dynamism of the rest of her life.

The depiction of her younger days have led some to conclude that the film depicts her as a feminist, but this can only be arrived at by someone who has either not seen the film or defines 'feminism' in such broad terms so to render the idea largely meaningless.

This film does show a woman prepared to argue her

point of view and infiltrating a particularly powerful boys club but that's about it.

She does nothing to challenge gender stereotypes or to advance the cause of female equality and challenge the structures of patriarchy- the photograph of her posing with the all-male cabinet she appointed is faithfully reproduced. "I've always preferred the company of men" she tells her daughter, Carol.

Indeed, she finds it impossible to form a relationship with other women, from her mother and the neighbourhood girls of her adolescence, to her own children (she disappoints Carol when she insists on phoning her brother in South Africa for a second opinion).

In fact, beyond having to put up with a put-down from a Labour MP for 'screeching' and some snobby comments from some constituency party Tories, you wouldn't even know from this film that she had much to overcome.

However, its failure to

provide context to her political life is a problem that the film fails to overcome. There are occasional uses of original news footage but it's largely superficial.

Images of picket lines and riots flash up on screen but with no indication of how the daily lives of people were impacted in practical terms.

Massive events from her life are conspicuous by their brevity- not least the Miners' Strike. Even her own demise is depicted as much is a result of her own hubris and bullying of Geoffrey Howe rather than any policy differences or wider outside political pressures.

Removing her words and ideology from their consequences renders any supposed insight into the character partial at best and as such the film doesn't fully succeed on its own restricted terms.

"Feelings do not interest me, thoughts and ideas are what matter the most," Thatcher says on more than one occasion. Her political philosophy mattered to her- indeed it defined her- but Morgan avoids dealing with it in any depth.

There are interesting things in this film, and its central performance is undeniably excellent. However, there is so much more that could have been said on which they've chosen to stay silent.

There is no need to fear that people too young to remember will watch this and come out feeling positive about her- there's not enough politics in it to understand either her attraction to some or why she is still hated by so many.

WHAT YOU LOOKING AT?



YOU know what? I hate films.

Films are rubbish, even the good ones. Before writing this, I sat down and tried to make a list of my ten favourite films, and it's a pitiful sight.

I'm not being deliberately low brow here, I don't think, but the ones that seem to come top of the list are your bog standard comedies, the *Airplanes* etc, that get hardwired into your cultural DNA from an early age.

I honestly enjoyed watching *George of The Jungle* (watch out for that tree!) with the kids recently than almost anything by Ken Loach.

Of course, I've pretended to like films, in the past, to impress people. There I am, being a dick, giving it, "oh, have you not seen Goddard's Un Poo de Clog? It's an intensely visceral two hours of the most profound cinema, featuring an unnamed actor weeping over a jobby in a shoe in a Silesian pension before detonating the Nazi stick grenade he's lodged in his bum, it's my favourite film EVER."

If you are ever unfortunate enough to be in my company and find me talking about films, I am DRUNK and am LYING and should be laid low

by an ashtray or whatever else comes to hand.

I suppose there's just something about the whole process of film watching I can't abide. This idea that you have to make a contract with whatever film producer/Hollywood Evil Corps to give up at least two hours of your life to something that will, like as not, be shit.

And that it's rude/impossible to read during.

We're all matter in motion, hurtling senselessly through space and time till our brief spark of sentience is snuffed out and I don't really feel like parcelling out parts of that process and devoting them to an obviously too old Ben Stiller trying to hide a stiffie at his high school prom, with hilarious consequences, or, for that matter, a man looking at a poo in a clog set against a back drop of the Nazi annexation of the Sudetenland, with not so hilarious consequences.

Then there's the hellish ritual of going to the cinema. Awful. Three hours of failing to get comfortable, miserably rocking about from cheek to cheek, in a fart-filled stasis chamber full of sniffing and (who knows, it's dark) spunking strangers before being birthed back into the light and staggering about on the weakened legs of a foal That's Not Going To Make It.

That, comrades, is not an experience I enjoy. And just when I thought film couldn't get any worse, there has been an unholy amount of jibber-jabber over the past week or so about that Thatcher movie.

Fantastic. A Thatcher film. With Meryl Streep in it. Sounds great, eh?

At least it's got us talking about old Davros again. In fact, ignoring for a moment the fact that her joyless spawn are in



power just now, it's been hard to avoid her and her ideological cohort over the past few weeks.

Tebbit was exhumed from whatever ghoul-hole he now infests, tempted out no doubt by the promise of flesh, to talk about the film and, coincidentally, we have had the utter joy of Michael Forsyth, the *Breath of Death* made animate, popping up like a gas filled sea monster to tell us why We Must Obey Cameron's referendum proposals.

I'm glad to see this repugnant lot again for at least one reason.

There's been a bit of sniffiness, even on the left, about whether we should celebrate when Thatcher finally pegs it. Some, I'm guessing those mostly too young to have been there at the time, feel that we should act with magnanimity and not 'lose our humanity'.

To touch on films again, to me this would be like standing in the background tutting while the Ewoks play the bongos on the Stormtroopers' helmets at the end of *The Return Of The Jedi*.

Socialism is not just an intellectual exercise, there's a

heavy justice element and, at a very visceral but highly motivational level, a revenge element to it as well. Take one look at Tebbit, Fosyth, Cameron et al and consider the crimes these people have committed/are committing on our communities, and tell me, really, that you won't be glad when their ideological Godhead is sent screaming into the Sarlaac Pit to face eternal digestion.

Personally, I'll be exercising my humanity and celebrating her passing by getting steaming and making whoopee with the Wookies, even if that probably is one *Star Wars* reference too many.

Anyway, this film, the Thatcher one. It's probably shit. I don't know, I've not seen it. The fact that it's a film in the first place kind of suggests it will be.

However, in a *Rogue Reporter* first, I'm going to end on a cliff hanger and state that in a fit of journalistic endeavour/massive self loathing, I'm going to go and watch it. In a cinema, one with teenagers and hot-dogs and stuff. And report back.

To be continued. As they say in stupid films.

BRUTALITY ALL AROUND FOR DRC'S PEOPLE

by Mahiri MacAlpine

ON 9 December, Joseph Kabila was re-elected President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Overseen by international observers, this was the first ever election organised from within the DRC... and it was a whitewash. With serious electoral irregularities being minimised and ignored by the international community, the election was a farce.

The DRC is one of the richest countries in the world: a land rich in natural resources. Aside from the gold, diamonds and oil, it also holds approximately 80 per cent of the world's coltan - a mineral essential in just about any electronic device that you can think of. Yet the average income of a Congolese citizen is approximately £1.50 per week, and the country ranks last in UN indices of development, health, education and life expectancy.

Much of this is due to the ongoing violence over the control of these resources. Multiple armed groups operate throughout the country, using murder and mass rape as deliberate tactics to secure control of mines, material supply and trading routes.

Millions are made by these groups from the trade of such minerals, financing the purchase of weapons thereby giving them increased influence in a tragic spiral.

Since his election ten years ago, Kabila, despite tough rhetoric, has shown little appetite for tackling the violence engulfing the country in the ongoing quest for profit.

Congolese women in particular have been the collateral damage. With nearly half a million rapes estimated each year in a country with a population of approximately 60 million, systematic sexualised



JOSEPH KABILA

violence sustains the conflict and is used as a tool to gain and maintain control over resources.

Breaking marriages, families and kinship ties, it devastates communities rendering them fractured and traumatised, too weak to provide any local leadership or support to resistant efforts to the robber barons who strip their resources with impunity.

In a country with no legal abortion, rape also provides a steady stream of recruits for the militias. Children born of rape, rejected by their families and communities are abandoned to the streets and left to fend for themselves: easy pickings for the militia recruitment which need a steady supply of cannon fodder.

Brutalised and hungry, the prospect of regular meals provides a strong pull, while death and violence holds no fear for children already accustomed to its proximity.

While the militias and their trading partners strip the country's resources one load at a time, Kabila has been selling them off wholesale.

Approximately \$5.5 billion has been lost to the Congolese people through the government selling off state assets at a fraction of their value, including one sale of mining assets independently valued at \$800 million, sold for little over

\$100 million to a substantial and generous backer of Kabila's 2006 election campaign.

The international response to the Congo has primarily concentrated on the supply of conflict minerals, particularly targeting technology consumers, but a lack of a transparent supply chain means that there

is no ability for consumers to track where the resources used in their technological products are coming from.

In response these concerns the US government passed the Conflict Minerals Law - part of the Dodd-Frank Act, in July 2010 - yet there are considerable criticisms of this approach. Evidence is emerging that it is encouraging smuggling of the minerals into Rwanda and other neighbouring countries for certification thereby undermining the spirit of the law, paradoxically increasing the violence as armed militias fight over control of the extended supply chains.

For all the international hand-wringing, there is little appetite for supporting the Congolese people to have the governance and accountability which could provide the necessary oversight of the industry and tackle the ongoing lawlessness it fuels.

The main response of the UN and the US was to "appeal for

calm" in the face of the disputed election results, despite obvious electoral manipulation.

The rounding up of opposition figures following the election and threats of a brutal clampdown on any dissent have largely kept people off the streets. At the same time, international protests from the Congolese diaspora have been stamped down upon, with 143 arrested at a peaceful protest in London and a young woman in a coma after brutal policing of protests in Belgium, the former colonial rulers of the Congo, who first perfected the art of raping the country.

The Congolese are rapidly losing faith in the kind of democracy which only serves to provide Western consumers with a cover of legitimacy for the asset stripping of the country. This asset stripping will continue until the Congolese can establish security and respect.

Neither of these are possible when peaceful protests are met with violent repression and the diplomatic community colludes with fraudsters and charlatans to secure the supply of raw materials to

meet Western technology industry demands.

The campaign against conflict minerals cannot be effective until there is appropriate control over Congolese mines and transportation and that can only come with accountable and democratic governance.

The conflict, stolen elections and even the international protests are stunningly under-reported in the West, which has a vested interest in controlling the narrative of a democratically elected leader, besieged by brutal savages in a backward country, while the technology industry continues on apace.

THE CHANGING FACE OF 2012

by Bill Bonnar

THIS year will show if the Mayan prophesy for telling the end of the world will come

true or simply be the material for another Hollywood blockbuster. I suspect the latter.

What we can say with confidence is that the political and economic crisis engulfing capitalism will intensify with outcomes we can only guess at. This time last year, who would have predicted the cataclysmic changes taking place within the Arab world or the crisis in the Eurozone? All over the world capitalist government found themselves firefighting; with limited success. As they stemmed the crisis in one part of the system it would suddenly spring up elsewhere followed by the sounds of panic in the markets and anger in the streets. All the indications are that 2012 will prove even more dramatic.

Europe continues to be consumed by an uncontrollable debt crisis with the various governments like small ships on a stormy ocean buffeted by waves of volatile markets, mass resistance to their policies and the ever present risk of sinking into economic recession.

None of these governments have any real answers and are simply hoping that their ships can stay afloat long enough for the system, somehow, to sort itself out. There is every possibility that at least one country will default on its debt payments and if that happens; all bets are off.

In the United States it is presidential election year. Despite the disillusionment felt by many people in President Obama's first term



ELECTIONS: Chavez and Obama face voters in 2012

the feeling is that he will see off his Republican rivals and win a second term. This is based on the nature of the Republican candidates rather than any endorsement of Obama.

The reality is that the election is likely to extremely close with no guarantees of an Obama victory.

It is unlikely that he will be able to mobilise support in the same way as in 2008 while Republican voters are much more likely to vote and to rally round whatever candidate the party comes up with.

At least the American election will have the trappings of democracy. In Russia, in March, will be the Russian Presidential election.

The recent elections to the Duma were derided as rigged with no expectation that the Presidential election will be any different. This caused some shock in the West but the reality is that every post-Soviet election has been rigged; its just that the West didn't mind when its client, Yeltsin, was President.

In Russia, the ruling oligarchy choose the person who best represents their interests to become President. They then finance his election campaign to the tune of

billions of roubles taken from state funds, turn the media into an election vehicle, 'organise' the counting of votes to make sure the results are correct while using the state hinder the opposition at every turn.

Then when their man is elected he rules an effective dictator due to emergency legislation pushed through by his predecessor until the next election when the process starts again. What is now clear from events at the end of last year is that significant sections of Russian society are no longer prepared to put up with this farce. Post Soviet Russia is a country defined by corruption and lawlessness, grotesque inequality, poor social services and mass poverty overseen by a mafia-like regime.

Another key election will take place in Venezuela. The Venezuelan Revolution has now come to a crossroads. Despite almost a decade of Left Government led by President Chavez and impressive social gains fuelled by the oil industry the Right is on the ascendancy. More united and confident than hitherto they sense an opportunity for advance; which means that this election

will be tighter and more bitterly fought than ever. The problem the Venezuelan Revolution is that after nearly a decade with a majority in government and huge oil reserves at its disposal it has yet to make that decisive break with capitalism. Whatever the outcome of the election the revolution in Venezuela is facing a decisive moment.

The dramatic and often contradictory movement for change in the Arab world, begun last February in Tunisia, continues. Libya remains a tinderbox as those elements of the former regime, supported by their western paymasters, who now dominate the new regime, seek to control the tribal and Islamic groups who actually did most of the fighting. The conflict in Syria could well tip into civil war while the struggle for democracy in Egypt and Morocco continues. United States and Israeli aggression against Iran is likely to intensify with the possibility of this escalating into a major conflict.

The coming year will be dramatic and creates great challenges for the Left. As ever, it is about turning our critique of capitalism into an effective movement for socialism. For the immense majority of people in the world capitalism represents crisis, instability, poverty, inequality and oppression. For the planet it represents a level of degradation that it may not recover from. The achievement of socialism is not about creating an attractive alternative to the current system.

It is, in the words of one of the early Bolshevik leaders, about rescuing the world from barbarism.

STANDING AGAINST CUTS

by Jim Bollan

THE Local Council Elections on 3 May will be more important than ever for working class people and their families throughout Scotland.

As the crisis in Capitalism deepens and the Westminster Tories inflict further deep cuts in wages, jobs, public services and benefits to bail out the greedy bankers it is critical that aligned to the national movement we elect Councillors in May in our local communities who will not only fight the cuts to local services and jobs but will refuse to implement savage cuts from the Tories to many of the vital public services organised and delivered by public sector workers.

Across Scotland Tory cuts to jobs and services have been implemented by Labour and SNP Councillors without as much as a whimper.

Regardless of the needs of the people who elected them to defend these services all Councils have toed the Tory line and slashed budgets and increased charges for services to the elderly, sick, young and disabled.

The Scottish Socialist Party stands alone in Scotland in trying to set "defiance budgets" or "no cuts budgets" which reflect the needs of the Communities we represent and serve. A vote for the SSP on 3 May will help to elect Councillors committed to fighting for the rights of working class families against the savage attacks from the Tories, which are meekly carried out by



SNP and Labour Councillors.

Building resistance locally will play a big part in fighting back against the Tory cuts and the first step to this can be achieved in May by voting in Scottish Socialist Party Councillors who are committed to defending our communities and working to build and help create a real fight back at community level.

I am extremely proud that the SSP is a bottom up party where we work and campaign at street level in our communities on the issues that affect peoples lives. It is by helping to build networks of local people that will give

us the strength and ideas how to combat the Tory onslaught which is coming in 2012.

It is also time for the Trades Unions to stand up and be counted and link the fight with working class communities to defend their members jobs and local public services.

It is time to take a stand.

The SSP will stand beside and support communities in defence of their public services this includes taking non violent direct action as well as acts of civil disobedience similar to the actions which helped to defeat the hated Poll Tax.



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:

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