

# Scottish Socialist VOICE

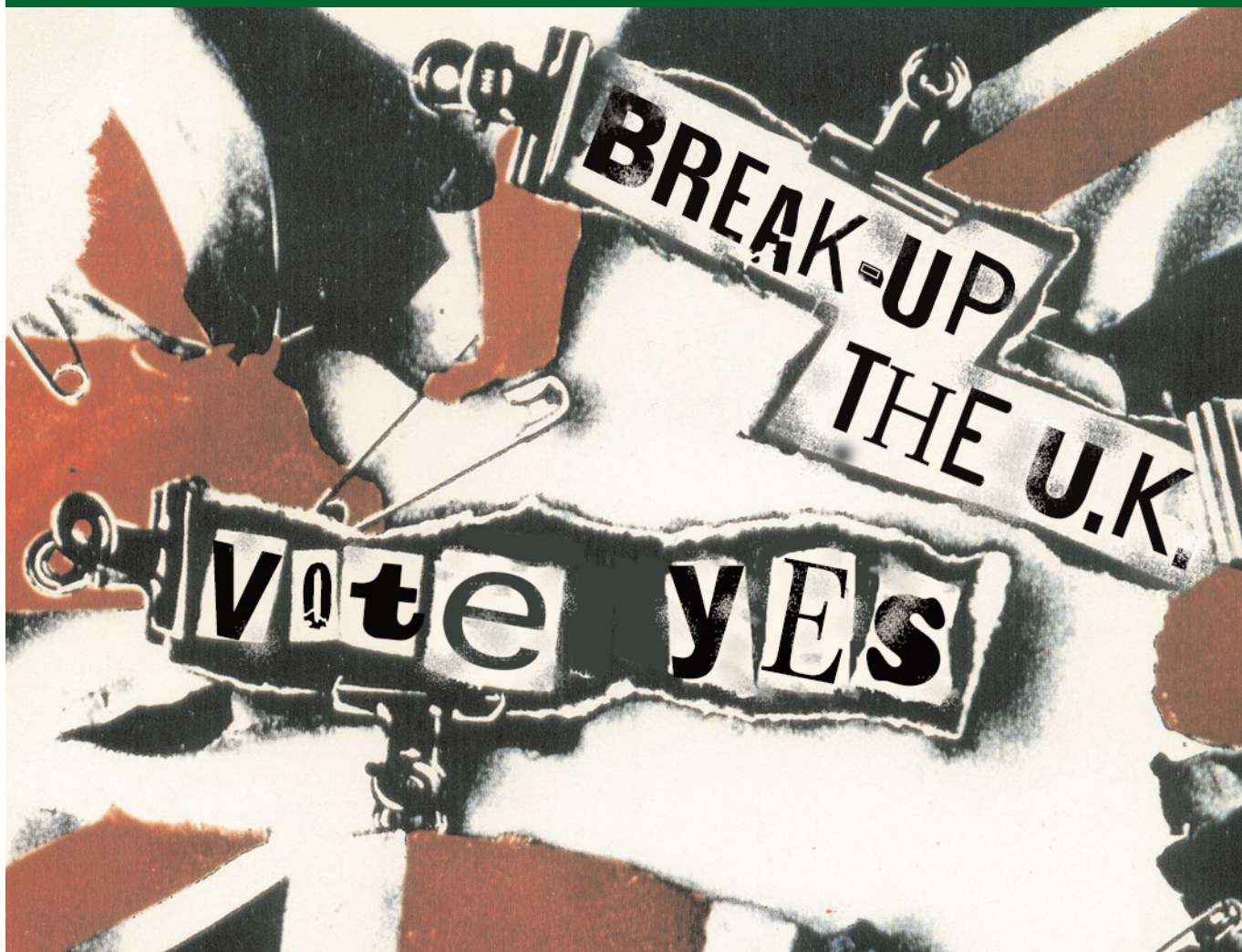


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£1 ISSUE 388 27TH JANUARY - 9TH FEBRUARY 2012

A SCOTTISH SOCIALIST PARTY PUBLICATION



# FOR AN INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST SCOTLAND!

# THE SMOKE AND MIRRORS OF UNIONISM

by Ken Ferguson

**TWO** weeks in and two years to go the air around Scottish politics grows ever more foggy with newly discovered legal problems, looming economic disasters and a host of ever more improbable “reasons” preventing independence.

From the gravely intoned legal “advice” of Lord Wallace that it is all illegal to the scribing of former *Scotsman* “politics” editor Hamish McDonnell’s demand to know if we can expect border guards to grow on every hand.

It was the Italian Marxist Gramsci who warned that the ruling elites don’t just have walls around their fortresses of power but behind them moats, ditches and more walls.

In Scotland’s case walking again zombie politicians from the loathed Michael Forsyth through to the bumbling Henry McLeish are backed by an army of unionist experts in the engine room of the fear machine.

It is crucial to understand that what is happening here is not a theoretical academic seminar room debate but a deadly battle for the survival of one of the great arches of capitalism’s world dominance - the British state.

All the guff about border guards, not getting Coronation Street or being able to visit your auntie in Middlesborough only with a visa are simply the tip of Britannia’s iceberg.

Smoke screens were first used by the Roman legions who burnt green vegetation to cover their manoeuvres and parliament and press are stuffed with their successors in the independence debate.

Bluntly, Cameron, Clegg,



**CAMERON & MILIBAND: Unionist buddies**

Milliband and their Scottish acolytes know that what is at stake isn’t trivial debating points but the future of Scotland as either a battering ram for progress or prop for war and plunder in bloodstained Britain.

The future of British weapons of mass destruction and control of the North Sea oil riches are just two of the most prominent issues keeping the London mandarins awake at night.

In their nightmare an independent Scotland sends Trident to the Thames and at a stroke achieves what CND has fought for for over 50 years - UK nuclear disarmament.

With the loss of the bomb may well follow the loss of the UK’s seat at the UN top table, the Security Council where its role as an echo sounder for the US is legendary.

Closely related to this would be the future ability of the Brits to recruit young Scots to their war machine where, although dressed in tartan, they fight and die under the Union Jack.

From Jim Murphy to David Cameron the key role of Scottish recruits is praised, lauded and steeped in British myth and legend.

Yet according to failed LibDem leader Menzies Campbell if the same forces were under Scottish control they would be simply a “militia”.

The importance of such statements is not in their actual content but in the unionist arrogance bordering on contempt just under the highly polished veneer of “politics as usual” on the Westminster benches.

In the long haul ahead the pro independence Left has a Herculean task not just to see

the breaking of the British state but to win the understanding that a different way is not only possible but essential.

The rich tradition of justice and peace summed up by Burns and thousands of nameless activists can be translated into reality if independence leads to a Socialist republic.

Far from the Brigadoon myth peddled by the loyal servants of imperialism an independent republic can be a beacon of justice, internationalism and solidarity both at home and abroad and that is the prize before us.

If it can be won then the impact across the rest of the UK and beyond would be profound and progressive.

And it would, in the immortal words of Hamish Henderson “make the vile barracks of the masters bare”.

# TRADE UNIONS AND THE LABOUR CON

by John McAllion

**UNIONS TOGETHER** is the campaigning voice of the 15 trade unions that affiliate to the Labour Party in the UK. Its website boasts that the unions and the Party have stuck together through a hundred years of shared history because “together we are stronger” and because the needs of ordinary workers “remain at the heart” of the Labour Party’s policy programme.

Not surprisingly, the website is silent on the latest row to erupt between Labour and its affiliated unions. It fails to mention that the General Secretary of UNITE (the Party’s largest union affiliate) has accused the Labour leadership of endorsing savage Tory cuts and of effectively “disenfranchising” trade unionists.

It ignores too the threat by the GMB (the third largest union affiliate) to reconsider its financial backing for the Party over the policy U-turn on spending cuts and public sector wage freezes. From the perspective of GMB General Secretary Paul Kenny this constituted a “most serious mistake” that called into question the union’s continuing relationship with Labour.

There is no reference at all to the Labour leadership’s failure to consult or even to forewarn the unions in advance of their public embrace of the Coalition’s austerity programme. This latest policy betrayal came wrapped in a public humbling of trade union leaders that Labour leaders calculated would play well in the Party’s target seats in the South-East of England.

Moreover, it was a public humiliation paid for by the unions themselves.

The fact that UNITE and the GMB together had contributed more than £7million to Labour funds since the general election of 2010 cut no ice whatever with



Miliband and Balls. The former dismissed union anger on Radio 5 with the words “...that’s tough because I’ve got to do the right things for the Labour Party and for the country”

Doing the “right thing” for trade unions and their members obviously never occurred to him. The electoral anxieties of his “squeezed middle” mattered much more to him than did the savage cuts to the living standards of unionised workers.

Claims that Labour and the unions were “stronger together” turned out in the end to be no more than empty rhetoric. The hundred years of shared history might as well never have happened. Labour’s leaders calculate, of course, that the unions may fulminate in public over the latest treachery but ultimately will carry on affiliating to and funding their Party. They constantly remind the unions that Labour is the only political game in town. They warn them that they might not like what Labour is doing but the alternatives are even worse – either more of the Coalition or a majority Tory Government blue in tooth and claw.

Yet, such claims are beginning to look increasingly threadbare.

“Unions Together” boasts 15 affiliated trade unions with a membership of 3million workers. The TUC represents 58 different trade unions with a membership of 6.5million workers. There are more organised workers and

many more trade unions outside of the Labour Party than there are inside it.

Already for the majority of trade unionists Labour is not the only game in town.

Even those unions inside Labour are less than wholly committed to the Party. UNISON has 1.3million members but affiliates less than half that number to Labour. The majority of its membership has no direct link with Labour. The union is even required to run two separate political funds to accommodate the minority who support Labour and the majority who do not. There is also a long history of internal struggle within UNISON to disaffiliate from Labour.

The unions outside Labour include some of the most militant in defending their members terms and conditions against the attacks of successive Tory, New Labour and Coalition Governments.

RMT’s Bob Crowe or PCS’ Mark Serwotka may not be included in Ed Miliband’s list of favourite union people. They refuse to support politicians like him who are happy to sell their members down the political river. But that is precisely why those same members elect them time and time again as their general secretaries.

Labour still needs the unions’ money. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the unions no longer need Labour’s political

protection.

More than 100 years ago, the unions helped to form the Labour Party to represent them in the House of Commons. Back then the Commons lay at the heart of a unitary, unchallenged and monolithic British state. It no longer does.

The British state is now in the process of disintegration. New centres of political power have appeared in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. The political sovereignty of the Crown-in-Parliament is seriously threatened by the ongoing referendum campaign on Scottish independence.

New political formations have been encouraged by proportional electoral systems that have broken the old system of dual power that favoured Labour and the Tories for so long.

Massive political changes are already under way. Sooner rather than later the trade union movement will have to embrace change as well.

There are different ways of bringing union influence to bear on the political process.

Unions elsewhere in the world, such as the AFL/CIO federation in the United States, refuse to tell their members how to vote. They remain wholly independent. They are in no political party’s back pocket.

They choose to back mainly Democratic candidates but will also support candidates of other parties who support issues of concern to their members. They are free to support or to withdraw support from those candidates as they see fit.

No political party dare snub or lecture or tell them what they have to do. They are free to pursue only those political goals that are in their members’ interests. They are one model of a different kind of trade union politics. Unions Together should look to their example learn.

# UNITY THE KEY TO A YES RESULT

by Campbell Martin

**UNIQUE** amongst the peoples of the world, only the Scots are incapable of governing themselves. Well, that is the only conclusion to be reached, if you believe the British Unionist propaganda.

Stripped bare, the Unionist line of argument tells us Scotland is too wee and too poor to be a real country, and the Scots too stupid to manage their own affairs.

So successful has been the Unionist propaganda that those of us who support independence find ourselves having to justify our position, as if it was an absurd concept, when, actually, independence is the normal status for almost every nation around the globe.

It is countries being dominated and governed by another that is the outdated, discredited position.

At a superficial level the Westminster argument for Scotland remaining in the Union is never going to win support north of the border – posh Oxbridge-educated politicians telling Scots what is good for them does not go down well. However, when we look closer at the supposed logic and reasoning behind the Unionist campaign, it actually achieves the opposite of what it sets out to do, it makes even stronger the case for independence.

They tell us Scotland could not stand on its own two feet because we are an economic basket case – after British Unionist Governments have run our economy for 300 years.

They say we rely on handouts from benevolent



English taxpayers – when we contribute more in taxation than we receive back, and when two of the largest annual contributions to the Westminster exchequer are revenue from the Scottish whisky industry and from North Sea oil (with around 90 per cent extracted from the Scottish sector). They say we receive more than our fair share in public expenditure because of the generous Barnett Formula – when the Barnett Formula actually works to reduce public expenditure in Scotland, irrespective of need. The British Unionist economic argument crumbles into dust when subjected to the bright sunlight of reality.

Whichever subject area the Unionists choose – economic, social, political, cultural – the facts show the paucity of their argument and reveal Scots would be better-off controlling our own affairs.

Of course, as we get nearer the autumn of 2014 and the referendum – and as polls continue to show the tide of opinion flowing towards

independence – we can expect the arguments emanating from London to get more and more ridiculous. We've heard them before, and we'll hear them again: there will be border posts at Gretna; you'll need a visa to visit your relatives in England; pensions will go unpaid; and broadcasts will be scrambled, so we won't be able to watch Coronation Street.

Just for the record: the visa-less, free-flow of peoples across national borders in mainland Europe has been the norm for around 20 years; pensions would be administered by civil servants, working in the same manner as present but for the government of Scotland rather than Britain, and would almost certainly be set at levels more generous than the current pittance delivered by Westminster. As for Coronation Street: viewers across the water in the independent Republic of Ireland are as up to date as us on the latest developments in the soap, but we could also check with relatives in Spain,

Portugal or Greece who watch the programme on satellite television.

Having said all of that, we do need to acknowledge there are differences of opinion within the independence movement and, as we approach the referendum, we need to ensure those differences do not dilute the strength of our collective argument, nor our commitment to achieve the best for the people of Scotland.

In the Scottish Socialist Party we will argue for a straight-forward question in the referendum – independence, yes or no. It is for devolutionists to argue for incremental growth of devolved powers: the SSP is a party that recognises Scotland requires the full powers that only come with independence before we can radically transform Scottish society and build a better, fairer country for all of our citizens.

We will therefore commit ourselves to delivering the best option for Scotland – independence.

While recognising pro-independence parties will continue to articulate our respective social and economic policies – on a range of issues the SSP holds different views to those of the SNP or the Greens – we must all agree to unite in maximising our forces for the fight against the massed ranks of the British Unionist parties – Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat.

By playing our part in delivering independence for Scotland, we will lay the foundation for truly transforming our country, so that all Scots can prosper in a democratic, Scottish socialist republic.

# GROWING IN NORTH AYRSHIRE

by Andrew Jones,

**THE** rise of the Scottish Socialist Party in North Ayrshire has grown and continues to grow. The reason for the continued success of the SSP in North Ayrshire is the people who have joined the party.

The support the SSP in North Ayrshire has received has been phenomenal and the support continues to gain pace.

We actively campaign in Irvine and Saltcoats with our street stalls. The street stalls have been an enormous success in the growth of the SSP.

People of North Ayrshire actively buy the *Scottish Socialist Voice*, donate, and get involved with petitioning against the cuts.

We have met many people at the street stalls and had many great compliments.

Recently in Saltcoats, one lady stated we were the only political party actively campaigning for people of North Ayrshire. In Irvine we have met people from Dumfries



**CAMPAIGNING:** on the streets of Saltcoats

and from the Isle of Skye, who signed the petition against the cuts.

We hold regular open meetings for the general public to come along and get involved in the issues that effect them.

The SSP has been the only political party that actively meets local people and campaigns on behalf of the local people, compared to the main stream political parties in Ayrshire.

The Scottish political landscape is changing at local and national level, the case for Socialism is growing. People

have grown weary and tired of the age of austerity. Why should people's pensions be cut, jobs lost, and benefits cut. Why have the people to suffer because of institutions who have gambled with public and private finance.?

The culture of corporate greed and the big bonus have angered a whole generation. The SSP (North Ayrshire) took part in the historic N30 strike last year, stood shoulder to shoulder with the strikers in North Ayrshire. We then went to Glasgow and marched with fellow strikers

as over 15,000 attended, over 2million in the UK

Is there hope for change? The answer is Yes! The local elections that will take place in North Ayrshire will give people a genuine opportunity to be heard. North Ayrshire is facing £34million worth of cuts to its annual council budget.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation states that 24 per cent of the population of North Ayrshire live in poverty.

North Ayrshire has the highest claimant of Job Seekers Allowance at 6.2 per cent. The equivalent national JSA claimant rates is 4 per cent for Scotland and 3.9 per cent for the UK as a whole.

The figures speak for themselves and will continue under the present ConDem/SNP leadership. The SSP is for change, a party of our own who unites the working class. Vote for your local SSP councillor and we will fight against the savage cuts that are taking place in North Ayrshire, we deserve better!

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# THE PENSIONS FIGHT IS STILL ON

by Richie Venton

**THE** outcome of the showdown between public sector workers and the Coalition government over pension rights hangs in the balance.

Most workers rightly saw the pension cuts as their best chance to unite against the different strands of vicious cuts. So setback or success on this issue is decisive to the fortunes of workers and communities.

If the two million or more workers who displayed such magnificent opposition on the November 30 strike were to suffer defeat because of the capitulation of some union 'leaders', it would not amount to the same historic setback of the 1984/5 miners' strike, but it would be a setback, nevertheless, compared to the potential this movement has to inflict defeat on the Coalition.

## High Stakes

The stakes are high. Alongside their attack on pensions, the Coalition are hammering the sick, disabled and unemployed and the prospect of wholesale privatisation.

Recent declarations that low- and middle-income workers face cuts in their real incomes until at least 2020 have accompanied 49 per cent rises in average salaries for company chief executives.

Whilst bank workers join the growing 'reserve army of labour' that languishes on the dole, Barclay's boss Bob Diamond is poised to pocket a bonus of £10million - outstripping even RBS boss Stephen Hester, set to get £1.3million on top of his £1.2million salary.

## Capitalist greed fuels anger

Every example of the greed



of bankers, capitalists and their political mouthpieces only adds fuel to the fire of workers facing a 'lost decade' of pay, pension and job cuts.

Any trade union leader in touch with these realities should be in no doubt about the need to battle the government with every available means, and the readiness of millions of workers to fight.

Millions didn't sacrifice a day's pay on N30 for the sake of it; they knew what was at stake and stood alongside fellow workers in the biggest and broadest display of working class solidarity in decades.

And when SSP members showed our support on the picket lines, most strikers volunteered the view "we'll probably be out again soon" because they knew one day would not be enough, because they were determined to see this battle through to victory.

## Members bombard union leaders

As we previously explained in the *Voice*, confronted by the biggest strike in generations, the Tory/LibDem boot-boys resorted to divide and rule tactics, leaning on the most right-wing and bogus-left union leaders in a desperate attempt to break the power of the united front of N30, they broadcast the big lie before Xmas that a deal

had been reached, the battle was over. Far from it!

They reckoned without the furious and determined opposition of ordinary trade union members to any sell-out; to any shoddy deal that still means paying more, for longer. Union activists and branches bombarded those leaders who caved in to Tory talk of this being the "new and final offer"...

## Rejectionist army grows

In the past few weeks, the pressure from below has had some positive effect.

After PCS (civil service), NASUWT and NUT (teachers) rejected the 'deal' from day one, the anger of members firmed up the UNITE leadership and gained sweeping rejection by them in local government, NHS, MoD and similar schemes covering 100,000 UNITE members.

Whereas the central leaders of UCU (lecturers) initially favoured a ballot of members on the grounds that the 'new' offer contained 'substantial' improvements, the unions' national executive met and rejected it by 3:1, agreeing to call for a united strike alongside other unions on 1 March.

The 'rejectionist' unions now include PCS, UCU, NUT, NASUWT, UNITE, NIPSA, EIS, FBU control staff.

## Battles in UNISON

The key points of weakness lies in the leaderships of UNISON and GMB, both in local government and the NHS. But even here, all is not lost.

In the NHS, UNISON leaders felt obliged to disguise their climb down by conceding an immediate ballot of members on a deal that still means paying more, for longer, to get less, for the vast majority of staff.

This gives the best fighters in the union the chance to organise and argue for rejection and continuation of the battle - a case since reinforced by the 80 per cent rejection of attacks on their pensions by the doctors' BMA.

Scottish UNISON's NHS Committee has rejected the deal.

In local government, SSP members in UNISON are combining with others to demand an emergency recall delegates the opportunity to debate (and hopefully reject) a rotten deal that is fundamentally no different to that on offer prior to the N30 strike. It would merely delay the misery by a year, to 2014

In Scotland, the Holyrood government has delayed the rise in council workers' contributions - but that is at best only guaranteed until the next budget, and is subject to cuts from Westminster to the Scottish budget, made all the more inevitable if Westminster manage to divide and 'see off' the united trade union resistance.

Scottish council workers still face retirement at 67 or 68 in line with the raised state retirement age, plus the 20 per cent cut due to CPI indexation of inflation; the Scottish government has absolutely no power over either of these issues.

The fight needs to go against all the pro cuts pensions robbers in Westminster and Edinburgh.

# NOTHING NEW ON OFFER TO WORKERS

by Richie Venton

**NOTHING** has changed for these workers who overwhelmingly voted to strike on N30, so why should they now accept and capitulate?

The fight for a recall local government sector UNISON conference, which requires support from 25 per cent of branches, is a central plank to overturning the capitulation agreed by a meeting of about 150 at UNISON's Sector executive committee, bombarded by a leadership that had even prevented votes at many angry regional meetings.

In turn, the readiness of UNISON (and GMB) members to overturn decisions reached by their own national leadership depends heavily on a further day of united strikes by the 'coalition of the willing' - the unions who have unequivocally rejected surrendering to the government.

These unions represent over a million workers, substantially more than the 750,000 who struck on 30 June and thereby dragged the likes of UNISON's leadership into joint action on N30, in stark contrast to their opposition to the June 30 strike.

## United one-day strike urgent

To their credit, PCS has called an urgent meeting of the 'rejectionist' unions, to discuss a joint strike date as part of a strategy to win.

Whether or not that is 1st March, as proposed by the UCU, it is urgent they name the day without delay, both to galvanise their own memberships before the momentum dribbles away, and to boost the fighting morale of members in the likes of GMB and UNISON who want to re-join a united front that has the potential to defeat the government.

Time is of the essence. Local councils are setting budgets, with tens of millions being



PHOTO: Craig Maclean

hacked off spending plans. With cold cynicism, both Labour and SNP councils are often trying to soften the blow for this, an election year, only to clobber jobs and services all the harder in the following two years.

No workers or communities should be fooled: the light appearing at the end of the tunnel is a train careering down the track wreaking havoc in 2013-15.

And in those councils where they do manage to conjure up relatively mild cuts for this (council election) year, it is at the terrible price of savage cuts in the past two or three years by the very same political groups in charge locally. Crude attempts to buy votes don't come free or cheap to the working class being offered the bribe!

## Public and private sector unity

The potential for an almighty showdown with the government remains. In addition to the large forces on standby for renewed action in the public sector, Unilever workers are conducting massive strikes in defence of their own pensions from up to 40 per cent cuts by the world's 8th-biggest company, and construction site workers are balloting for strikes, against 35 per cent pay cuts, that could commence on 9 February. Civil servants in the Revenue are battling privatisation and attacks on conditions, as are DVLA workers who face

wholesale office closures. There are many fronts in the fight; the task is to unite and co-ordinate them to maximum effect.

## Workers need a socialist voice

Workers need a political voice and vehicle as well as their industrial one. That is underlined in red by this whole pensions episode.

Ranged against them are not only the obvious enemy of the Tory/LibDem Coalition; they also encounter an SNP government that is endorsing and implementing the Coalition's further two years of pay cuts, failing to defy the spending cuts to councils and other public services; and a Labour party that has openly backed the slashing of public sector pay and services, allegedly to protect jobs.

When Ed Miliband pledged austerity under any future Labour government, he not only aided the Tory butchers in their brutal attack on workers and communities, but as UNITE leader Len McCluskey put it, "Where does that leave the half a million who marched on the TUC demo? Disenfranchised."

## Why feed the hand that bites you?

But that begs the question which the SSP first posed back in January 1999: why the hell should unions remain affiliated to Labour, funding a party hell-bent on attacking union members and

their communities? The unions - including UNISON, UNITE and GMB - last year contributed 91 per cent of Labour's funds - so they could slaughter jobs, services, pay and workplace rights.

To reverse the old proverb, why feed the hand that bites you?

It is no coincidence that those unions like PCS who have agreed a raft of radical socialist policies (including several initiated and written by SSP members in the union) are the most steadfast in resisting the Coalition's pensions theft.

Having a coherent political alternative that shows taxation of the rich, investment in jobs and public ownership of banks, major industries and services could prevent all cuts, is an indispensable weapon in challenging the government's attacks. It gives confidence to members that there really is an alternative, that there is no justification for stealing pensions, stealing another lump of their wages in a double taxation of public sector workers to pay for the bankers' bailout - and that it is worth fighting back, with a realistic chance of victory.

## Build fighting socialist union leaderships

The SSP in the unions is determined to help shape the outcome of a battle that hangs in the balance; we are not passive commentators, but active socialists and trade unionists determined to help stop capitulation by those union leaders who lack the vision or political principles to match members' courage.

Join us in advocating immediate steps to salvage the fight on pensions, thereby boosting the broader anti-cuts struggle, and join us in championing socialist policies in the unions, alongside replacement of union leaders who cave in at the first whiff of grapeshot with determined, fighting and democratic leaderships.

# 75 YEARS AFTER JARAMA BATTLE

**Bill Bonnar** recalls the story of the International Brigades 75 years after the opening of the famous Jarama battle

**IT** is the summer of 1987. A small crowd stand on the banks of the Jarama River taking part in a ceremony to remember those members of the British International Brigade killed during the battle and those who died in the wider struggle to defend democracy in Spain.

It was the 50th anniversary of the battle, General Franco was long dead and the ceremony a small dignified affair in a country still trying to come to terms with the legacy of the civil war. I had a personal interest. My uncle, Andrew Bonnar, was killed during the battle his place in family folklore secured.

This year marked the 76th anniversary of the outbreak of the conflict. It remains an event which continues to spark interest and debate and that sense of heroism and idealism which drove tens of thousands of young people from all over the world to travel to Spain and fight in defence of the Republic.

Quite simply the greatest single act of solidarity the world has ever seen.

The British Battalion was one small part of a huge international effort. In all around 50,000 people volunteered for the brigades; most coming from France and Italy. They came to defend a government under attack from the forces of international fascism; a foretaste of the war to come.

Spain had elected a Left Republican Government in 1936. When an attempted military coup against this government failed; the same



**British International Brigade volunteers in Barcelona**

generals called on support from Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy.

Italy responded by sending troops while Germany provided air support from the Luftwaffe as well as an almost inexhaustible supply of arms.

When the Spanish Government called on international support the western powers declared themselves neutral. This was a cynical ploy.

Knowing that General Franco was receiving all the support he needed it represented, in effect, a blockade on the Spain's elected government.

The call for support was met by the Soviet Union who supplied arms and other aid and by the International Brigades.

A striking feature of the British Battalion was the number of volunteers from Scotland; around one third. Most were members of the Communist Party which also organised most of the solidarity work in Scotland.

A great deal of work has been done in recent years to tell the story of these individuals; who they were, why they went and for those who returned, what were their views on the conflict.

They were overwhelmingly young men most of whom had never left Scotland before.

There would have been many more but for a careful selection process that tried to discourage those with dependants. They were highly politically motivated, driven by idealism and a sense of contributing to history in the making.

Perhaps the most telling part has been the testimony of those who survived. Given the bitter disappointment of the eventual the defeat of the Republic one would have expected a sense of disillusionment. Yet this is almost completely absent from these stories. They remained firmly convinced as to the reasons for travelling to Spain and most continued to be activists in the socialist movement in Scotland for decades after; proud of what they had contributed.

In fact, their main concern was that the history of what they had done and their legacy would diminish with time. The opposite has proved to be true. The last few years have witnessed an explosion of interest with meetings, commemorations and events all over Scotland. Almost every specific part of

the conflict is now being marked.

Sadly there are none of the volunteers left to take part.

The Spanish Civil War lasted for three years and the Republic was only eventually defeated due to the overwhelming strength of the fascist forces bolstered by equally overwhelming support from Germany and Italy.

But for the intervention of the International Brigades the conflict would probably have been over in a matter of months and was a precursor to the anti-fascist resistance movements in France, Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece which played such a key role in defeating fascism in their countries.

In fact, the backbone of the French Resistance Movement comprised many of the veterans from the Spanish Civil War.

After the defeat of the Republic Spain was plunged into a fascist nightmare which lasted until Franco's death in 1975. Around 200,000 republicans were executed after the conflict while many more fled into exile.

Even after 1975 a kind of collective amnesia existed in the country which has only been punctured in recent years. In fact, in March a Spanish court will officially launch an inquiry into the deaths of 114,000 republican prisoners killed by Franco's forces after the war ended.

In Scotland, the story of the International Brigades feeds into a rich socialist heritage which forms part of our movement today. The events may now be part of an increasingly distant history and those who took part are now gone yet, in another sense, heroes live forever.

# BATTLE HYMN OF THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE

by Bill Scott

## INTERNATIONAL

Brigades: It was the Comintern that organised the raising of volunteer International Brigades to defend democracy in Spain but those volunteering to fight included socialists, Wobblies, Labour Party & ILP members, anarchists, Trotskyists and ordinary trade unionists as well as communists.

An estimated 50,000 volunteers from fifty-five countries served in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. They were organised into the 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th Brigades.

Special mention should also be made of the 140 men of the Connolly Column who fought alongside the Lincoln and British Battallions as part of the XVth Brigade.

The Lincoln Brigade was commanded by an African American, Oliver Law – the first time that any American forces had been fully integrated and led by a black officer.

Amongst those who volunteered from Britain was a young Glasgow labourer and Communist Party member, Alex McDade, who became the Political Commissar for his brigade.

Almost as soon as Alex arrived, when the British volunteers had barely begun their military training, the XVth Brigade was mobilised to defend Madrid.

The Nationalists had launched a massive surprise attack over the Jarama River on 11 February supported by the Nazi German Condor Legion.

If their attack succeeded they would capture Madrid and split the Republic in two. On 12 February Alex and the volunteers of the British



Battalion took the brunt of the Nationalist attack, coming under heavy fire for seven hours.

They were forced to withdraw to a position later called 'Suicide Hill'. At the end of that first day of fighting, only 225 of the 600 troops of the British Battalion remained alive.

On 13 February a Nationalist flanking manoeuvre, supported by tanks, forced them to give up their position on Suicide Hill and retreat.

They were met by the commander of the 15th brigade, Colonel Gal, who convinced them that unless they returned to the attack Madrid, and the Civil War, would be lost.

With unbelievable courage, given the casualties they had already suffered, they returned to Suicide Hill causing the fascists occupying it to retreat in confusion.

On 17 February, the Republicans counter-attacked.

With heavy casualties on both sides a stalemate was reached with both sides digging in for trench warfare - but Madrid remained in Republican hands and the Republic survived another two years.

The Brigade's slogan was No Pasarán - they shall not pass - and the International Brigade remain the Workers' Movement's 300 Spartans.

Alex McDade wrote the original version of the *Jarama* setting it to the then well known music of the US folk song, *Red River Valley* - a song with much disputed origins but probably arising out of the Metis Rebellion on the Red River in Canada.

Typical of many soldiers' songs McDade's original lyrics bitterly mourned the waste of young lives at the front caused

by incompetence higher up.

The later version we sing today gradually evolved from it, partially during the Civil War itself, for Brigade veterans remember singing a version as their marching song.

However the last verse must have been added several years later as the first Brigade reunions did not take place until after World War II.

The XVth Brigade went on to fight at the Battle of Brunete.

By the time that battle was over Alex McDade, Oliver Law and many more were dead. Of the 140 men who originally volunteered for the Connolly Column all but one was dead or seriously wounded.

But the XVth and other Brigades fought on alongside their Spanish comrades until the end.

After the Republic surrendered in 1939 the Fascists demonstrated why socialists had fought them to the death.

Franco had over 100,000 Republican soldiers and sympathisers executed. Hundreds of thousands more were imprisoned in forced labour camps where many died.

Several thousand captured International Brigaders were also imprisoned. Some were later repatriated, others died in the Fascists' concentration camps.

The best version I've heard of the song is that by Scottish folk group the Laggan, sung back-to-back with the Italian Garibaldi Battalion's *Bandiera Rosa*. There's also a wonderful American/Spanish version of the song sung by Pete Seeger, live in Spain, shortly after Franco's death.

The full story of the Connolly Column is told in Christy Moore's very moving *Viva La Quinte Brigada*. Alex McDade, Oliver Law, Frank Ryan - I can but name a few.

# WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?



**HOPES**, don't have them. They're pish. You're not going to get what you want and if you do get it, any enjoyment will be squeezed from you in a horrific instant by the density of the reality pushing down on you, leaving you stuck to the carpet, a quaking, miserable sack of skin and pubes.

This is my credo and I stick by it, finding it a handy guide to everything in life, from politics to the last two seasons of *Doctor Who*.

I learnt this grim, but important lesson at an early age.

I too, you see, was also once one of life's jolly innocents, a happy go lucky stripling, all Panini stickers and burgeoningly lustful thoughts for Peter Davidson's assistants (not Adric).

Then I found the letters, the dial spun and the days darkened.

I was one of those youths much given with the telly and in the habit of writing to the Gods that inhabited its shady lanes and sunlit boulevards.

Like many, I tried *Jim'll Fix It*. I had quite the thing for David Attenborough (not in a burgeoningly lustful way, I don't think) and his ground breaking *Life On Earth* programme.

I was heavily into dinosaurs, before they became boring. I mean, they're ten a penny now, dinosaurs. Close your eyes, throw a brick and like as not you'll concuss even one of the more obscure ones, like *Coelophysis*.

But then, there weren't that many around, culturally, so I wanted Jim to fix it for me to go digging for them in North America. With David Attenborough.

I also wrote to the venerable Barry Took, asking him if he could show a bit of *Life on Earth on Points of View*. A bit featuring David Attenborough digging up dinosaurs. In North America.

The seasons changed and changed again, readers, and if I sound like Simon fucking Bates here, I don't care, and my lonely Thursday night, 8.50pm vigil continued, but my letter was never read out in a comedy BBC accent on *Points of View* and neither did the call come from Jim.

Then, years later, fate, and the search for a fiver, guided my hand, and one night as I was poking about in a drawer, I found the letters.

Yes, the same ones, scrawled in optimistic pencil to Jim and Barry.

Plus another rather strongly worded one to Golden Wonder complaining about some wildlife badges that had never arrived.

They had never been sent and hope toppled, splitting its stupid head on the rocks, revealing itself empty.

The die was cast and even when I got politically active, I picked the dourest lot from the cornucopia of Trotskyist exotica: the Militant.

Yes, we will have socialism. The crisis would come in five, ten, fifteen years, said old Ted Grant, looking reassuringly



**REQUEST: there you go Graham**

like a lump of primordial misery, albeit one with specs, reading the *Financial Times* (sorry, the 'bosses Militant'). We would have socialism, said the man who once claimed that heavy metal fans head-banging is a sign of capitalist decadence (he was right as well), but it will be grey, overalled, efficient but ultimately just slightly boring socialism.

And that has suited me fine all my adult life.

And now we're in the teeth of Ted's crisis, something's jolted and we're in the days where decades happen in weeks.

People are re-evaluating and maybe even beginning to challenge capitalism. Some of them, many young with haircuts, funny shoes and swearsy t-shirts, are actually laughing while they're doing it.

In Scotland, we're reaching a point where we genuinely have the chance to shape something better for ourselves, something which, though it might not be socialist, could mark a real advancement point in our lives.

Part the curtains of the crisis, and a riot of humanity in all its colours and brilliance and contradictions is shaping up.

Which is just bloody typical, isn't it.

I bet it'll be rubbish. It'll be too noisy. You'll never get near the bar. Getting a taxi will be murder.

Just my luck that I should be around in days like these.

■ So, that Thatcher film. Well, it's brilliant. Basically, Thatch moves to the Bahamas to get away from Arthur Scargill who she blames for killing Airey Neave, but Scargill follows her, so she enlists the help of Michael Heseltine and they run a big yacht right into Scargill, and that's him, pure deid. Ok, the culturally impoverished amongst you will have noticed that this is actually the plot of *Jaws 4: The Revenge*. I never, as promised, got round to seeing the Thatcher film. Sorry about that. But I did see *Jaws 4: The Revenge* and I heartily recommend it. It's got a shark in it that roars.

Bet the Thatch film's not got that.

# COSTA RICA ROAD THREATENS BORDER REGION

by Sam Gordon in  
Nicaragua

**WHEN** a river marks the border between two countries and the countries involved both agree on the border, no one could be blamed for thinking the matter was settled.

That was what happened in 1858 when the San Juan River (Rio San Juan) was established as marking part of the southern border between Nicaragua, on its northern bank and Costa Rica to the south.

But politicians have been wrangling over the border ever since.

Historians and researchers have written volumes on the subject. And it has kept journalists supplied with copy for a century and a half. So, enough said of all that; for the moment.

Not until comparatively recently has life for the people who live along its banks seen any noticeable change. Some cattle ranchers do seem quite well off, on the rich and abundantly watered land.

## The Chance of a Change

But for most of the people it's not paradise. Life has been a hard, eked out on land cleared from the tropical forest. A tropical rain forest which they share with monkeys and crocodiles, exotic birds and river turtles.

On the Nicaraguan side there have been some improvements over this past twenty years. On my first visit to the ferry port of San Carlos in 1988 I put it on my list of most miserable places to be. Down river was the even grimmer Boaco de Sabalos, another place I didn't miss.

For sure, reference to Rio San Juan would be complete without a mention of El Castillo. It's not exactly



Nicaraguan soldiers patrol in Rio San Juan near the border with Costa Rica.

Edinburgh castle perched on a rock in the centre of a city. But it is a sizeable fortress over looking rocky rapids which slowed down English pirate ships in the 17th century, just as they came into canon range.

But times have changed. These towns are by no means rich and opulent.

But with improved road and air transport they have become better connected to the rest of Nicaragua. The tidy streets and market places have an air of optimism.

Tourists who want to avoid the big hotels and crowded bars seek out smaller stop overs. They take boat trips and explore the numerous creeks and back water inlets. Then it's back to good restaurants in a quiet town.

## Paradise Lost?

The matter of the border might have been settled but unfortunately, over almost 150 years, this tranquillity and improved quality of life has been shattered. The river has silted up and settled in another

place, close to where it enters the Caribbean Sea.

The environmental impact of this act of nature has a political consequence. Nicaragua loses some of its national territory. That's sensitive at the best of times. But for the Nicas it's salt in the wound.

They lost the big regions of Guanacaste and Nicoya to Costa Rica around the middle of the 19th century, when their Conservative and Liberal leaders were engaged in a civil war. And these elites never got their act together to reclaim the occupied territories.

So when Nicaragua started dredging a silted up section of the Rio San Juan last year the political wrangling stared all over again. The Nicaraguan government said it was to restore the river and thereby the border, to where they were when the 1858 treaty was signed.

In support of the dredging operation Nicaraguan soldiers were stationed on an island claimed by both states.

Tensions rose and the

wrangling got wrapped up a few factors.

On the Costa Rican side of the river a new road way has been bulldozed through the forest for 120 kilometres, sometimes 20 metres from the river edge; hardly the act of an environmentally friendly government.

The Costa Rican government made sounds of denial about any environmental damage to the shared region. It has asked the Nicaraguans to provide "scientific, objective and serious information" on such claims. And where is their own environmental impact assessment?

But perhaps the most unsavoury platitudes of pollution come from Laura Chinchilla, president of Costa Rica, who is reported to have said, "we Costa Ricans are going to be able to travel our northern border by a route that is not exclusively limited by the Rio San Juan. That is an inheritance we are going to leave Costa Rica that I feel incredibly proud of".

## THE POSITIVE CASE FOR INDEPENDENCE

*Scottish Socialist Party statement on the Independence Referendum*

**SCOTLAND'S** New Year hangover had barely subsided when David Cameron gate-crashed the country's Independence debate effectively detonating the inherent conflict between Westminster and Holyrood, between 'legality' and 'political reality', between an unpopular unionist Coalition in London with no mandate and a popular nationalist Government in Edinburgh.

The battle lines are now being drawn in a titanic political struggle with no quarter given or expected.

But there can be no doubt that the main event in Autumn 2014 will feature an epic contest to answer one key question - will the people of Scotland be better off as part of the United Kingdom or in an Independent nation?

The Scottish Socialist Party is in no



doubt about the answer.

We have been committed to an independent socialist Scotland since our inception in 1998. We are convinced that working people will be economically, socially, politically and culturally better off if we are able to make our own decisions, control our own economy, direct our own resources and determine our own destiny in the world.

We favour a bold referendum with one

straight question – Independence Yes or No?

We believe the elected Scottish Parliament should oversee the referendum process to ensure it is carried out fairly and democratically. And we have, for the record, long advocated that 16 and 17 years olds should be enfranchised.

The SSP is convinced that if the Independence movement takes its case round the country with enthusiasm and

energy, to every community, town and village, then we can win a majority in the 2014 referendum .

We are hugely encouraged by evidence which shows that an independent Scotland would not countenance the appalling levels of inequality, child poverty and fuel poverty which continue to blight our country, would never have accepted the privatisation of our hospitals, schools, prisons or other vital

public services.

We would not have sent Scottish soldiers to die in Iraq or Afghanistan, would not allow Trident nuclear missiles to be stationed on our soil.

The Scottish Socialist Party will campaign energetically and with great enthusiasm for a Yes vote. We helped to found the Scottish Independence Convention in 2004 and we continue to work within it towards maximising support for that Yes vote.

Our goal is an independent socialist Scotland, a modern democratic republic. We believe such a Government will be able to ensure the sovereignty and autonomy of the Scottish people is ranked above the aims of British Imperialism and international capital.

That commitment to socialism and democracy is what sets us apart from the other parties.



## 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](http://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

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