

# Scottish Socialist VOICE

£1 ISSUE 391 9TH - 22ND MARCH 2012

A SCOTTISH SOCIALIST PARTY PUBLICATION

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# WHY MUM'S GONE TO ICELAND

by Jo Harvie

**ICELAND** perches stoically on the very north western edge of Europe. It's rarely covered by outside media, unless a little volcanic explosion causes international travel chaos. And then there was that time its entire banking system collapsed, which turned out to be where a number of Scottish local authorities had invested most of their schools budgets.

With a population of 320,000, the SNP used to point to Iceland as a beacon of successful small nation capitalism, until economic disaster hit in 2008. In the wake of that collapse, which saw the country's three major banks go into administration, Alex Salmond has been accused of ignoring his former pin-up, like a teenager who goes emo overnight pretends they never had One Direction on their wall.

But there are fascinating things happening in Iceland just now, things which hold more inspiration for Scotland's future than flash-in-the-pan capitalist growth.

In the UK brutal economic cuts are hitting women hardest. "Decades of steady, albeit slow, progress on equality is being dismantled, as cuts to women's jobs and the benefits and services they rely on, turn back time on women's equality," argue the Fawcett Society, with the backing of many other organisations. Meanwhile, Iceland will mark International Women's Day this week as the 'best country in the world to be a woman'. For the last two years, the World Economic Forum's study of the gender gap in different sectors, including pay, access to education and political representation, has found Iceland to have the



**CLOSED:** Icelandic feminists protest outside strip club

greatest degree of equality between men and women in the world.

It does not yet qualify as feminist paradise, with women earning on average 10 per cent less than men – though that compares well to the UK's gender pay gap of 19.9 per cent. But Iceland has developed policies which have had measurable impact on women's workplace equality, such as their remarkable parental leave system where couples get nine months' paid leave at around 80 per cent of salary – three months to be taken by one parent, three months to be taken by the other, and the remaining three months to be shared between them as they wish.

The women's movement plays a central role in politics in Iceland.

In 1970, 'the Redstockings' feminist group caused a flutter of shock as they marched in Reykjavic's May Day parade, carrying a giant copy of the statue Venus bearing the sign "A Human Being – Not a Commodity". Just five years later the women's movement had gathered such force of support, a staggering 90 per cent of women in Iceland participated in a one-day

strike, refusing to work at home or their workplace, as a protest against unequal pay and oppression of women.

When Vigdís Finnbogadóttir became Iceland's president, and the world's first democratically elected female head of state in 1980, just 5 per cent of the country's MPs were women. In 1983 women formed an explicitly feminist party, the Women's Alliance, which at its highest level of support held six of Iceland's 63 parliamentary seats.

Now, 43 per cent of MPs are women, including Prime Minister Johanna Sigurðardóttir.

These achievements haven't seen women's campaigning tail off, though. To highlight women's continuing low pay, the retail and office workers' union organised a temporary 10 per cent discount in major shops for women. And the spirit of the Redstockings was evoked in 2010 with a 'women's day off', protesting pay inequality and men's violence against women. A sixth of the population, 50,000 people, demonstrated in Reykjavik.

Iceland's women's movement has fearlessly opposed the oppression which

allows women's bodies to be bought and sold. Like other Scandinavian countries, Iceland has criminalised paying for sex, while legally protecting prostituted women, and introduced a plan to prevent trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Further, Iceland has introduced a law – passed almost unanimously in their parliament – which scrapped strip clubs, making it illegal for anyone to profit from their employees' nudity. Guorún Jónsdóttir, who works with an organisation that campaigns against sexual violence, told *Guardian* writer Julie Bindel that the new law means "the men of Iceland will just have to get used to the idea that women are not for sale".

The possibility of independence affords us the chance to imagine a Scotland in which we want to live, and equality for women should be a central tenet. So let's look to Iceland's efforts and achievements.

We need women at the forefront of shaping our idea of an independent Scotland – which means campaigning has to extend well beyond our existing political institutions, where women's representation remains stuck at one third. We can't allow the independence debate to be dominated by posturing, powerful men.

We have an opportunity to build a 21st century nation, and it must be one where tackling our atrocious conviction rate in rape cases is an absolute priority, where organisations working with women survivors of violence don't have to beg for funding, and where the gender pay gap is consigned to history.

In Scotland too, we could get used to the idea that women are not for sale.

# INDEPENDENCE IN EUROPE OR INDEPENDENCE IN THE WORLD?

by Campbell Martin

'INDEPENDENCE in Europe' was adopted by the SNP as a policy and political slogan in 1989, following publication the previous year of a pamphlet with the same title, written by Jim Sillars.

However, the idea of 'Independence in Europe' was not new in 1989: Jim Sillars had first advocated it as a policy in 1976, while he led the short-lived Scottish Labour Party. For younger readers a point of clarification may be needed here: the Sillars-led Scottish Labour Party bore no relationship or resemblance to the current party of the same name.

Jim Sillars had served the UK Labour Party as MP for South Ayrshire before leaving to form the entirely separate Scottish Labour Party in January 1976. One of the prime motivations for the breakaway and formation of the new party had been the then Labour Government's 'foot-dragging' over the introduction of legislation for a devolved Scottish Assembly.

There are others better placed than me to explain why the Scottish Labour Party tore itself apart in the space of just a few years, but the end result was Sillars and some others left the party they had formed and joined the SNP in 1980.

If you ask SNP members today about the party's 'Independence in Europe' strategy, they will tell you it reflects the organisation's commitment to European integration and to placing Scotland 'at the top table of Europe'.

In 1989, though,



'Independence in Europe' was introduced by Jim Sillars as a way of addressing British Unionist allegations that independence would leave Scotland isolated. As a strategy it was effective and helped allay public fears regarding how a post-independence Scotland would interact with other nations.

Twenty-three years on, 'Independence in Europe' remains a core policy of the SNP but has been ditched by its author, Jim Sillars, who now favours an independent Scotland operating outwith the European Union but within the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), a position that would still bind us to the EU's pro-capitalist, free-market liberalisation agenda.

As a slogan, 'Independence in Europe' served its purpose – blunting isolationist claims of Unionist parties in the 1990s – but as a policy it would potentially expose an independent Scotland to the nightmare reality of a European Union that has become little more than an adjunct of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The EU has moved very far from its original ideology of

raising the living standards of peoples across Europe. Today, the organisation operates to give multi-national corporations access to national markets, where workers can be exploited and where democratically-elected politicians are replaced by 'technocrats' who operate in the interests of global capital rather than those of ordinary men, women and children.

The situation in Greece is the clearest example of how the European Union now operates: national finances, and as a consequence the living standards of the population, are determined by decisions taken by three unelected bodies, the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank. The EU now slavishly follows the neo-liberal doctrine of 'opening up' the public sector in member states to the 'competitiveness' of the free market, which actually means privatising publicly-owned assets, sacking workers and driving-down wages and conditions for those who remain.

Amid the broad spectrum of arguments currently raging about what an independent Scotland would look like,

British Unionists frequently throw up three questions relating to the European Union: Would we automatically assume EU membership post independence? Would we be forced to join the Euro? Would Spain veto Scotland's membership for fear it could encourage national movements in the Basque country, Catalonia and Galicia? The answers are: probably; no; and the Spanish Government has already said an independent Scotland's membership of the EU has got nothing to do with them.

However, those questions are a distraction from the real issue, which is how EU membership is not in the interests of Scots.

Closer examination of its 'Independence in Europe' position reveals the SNP has a very strange idea of what 'independence' actually means. In the SNP's independent Scotland, we would retain the British monarch as Head of State; we would retain Sterling as our currency, with interest rates set by the Bank of England; and we would be a member of the European Union, with all that entails in terms of Commission directives and European Central Bank decisions: so much for sovereignty resting with the people of Scotland.

There is nothing isolationist about being an independent country, free from external capitalist influence, free to operate fully in the interests of the Scottish people, and free to work in friendship and solidarity with other nations around the globe.

'Independence in the World'.

# WHY I JOINED THE SCOTTISH SOCIALISTS

**Paul Jordan** is 46 and lives in Oxbgangs, Edinburgh. He recently joined the SSP. He told **Colin Fox** his story.

“**MY** last job was supervising a homeless hostel in North Yorkshire. I grew up along the North East coast of England between Hull and Scarborough, my parents were working class Tories who only read the Sun.

“My mother was a homemaker and had various jobs, my stepdad was an engineer and aspired to own his own business. I was taught that national service was good because it made men out of boys, the death penalty was right, and homosexuality was wrong. The British Empire had brought great benefits to other countries they said and the overriding reality of life is that you have to look after number one.

“As a teenager I also aspired to be self employed, first in photography, then in the music business. At 16 I joined the Young Conservatives. My boss was a member and I saw it as a chance to get me out of the village once a week to meet people. I was told the Tories supported entrepreneurs, they offered common sense and progress, such as the first female Prime Minister. I missed a lot of school and had probably read a total of 2 books by the age of 20.

“I recently learnt about the treatment of the Chagos islanders and compared it with the Falklanders, as I recalled going on a pro-Falklands war rally. Thinking back on my first tentative teenage steps into politics, I struggle to recall my arguments for supporting the Tories, though I fear I must have had them.



“The thing with capitalists of course is, it’s all about winners and losers, the implication inferred is that if you don’t aspire to win, then you’ll be a loser. Capitalists know they can’t win by being transparent, honest and fair, so they end up twisting and distorting everything. ‘Common sense’ makes no sense, ‘peacemaking’ is a belligerent act, ‘transparency’ is obscured, ‘freedom’ is suppressed, ‘democracy’ dictated and ‘equality’ woefully absent.

“The 1980’s and the music business finished any capitalist aspirations I had and left me with drug and mental health problems, which wiped out the 1990’s for me, along with my studies in Social Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African studies in London.

“My politics changed during these years however. I became homeless and travelled a lot, got back into photography, started reading, mainly fiction. I went on a G8 protest in the late 90’s and marched against the Iraq war in 2003. In 2009 I started to read political books and quickly realised I was a socialist. *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* was the start of my

awakening and I was keen to become active. At first I thought union activism might be the way, but further reading made me realise the unions had become too concerned with defending their assets and well paid jobs to seriously stick their necks out for working people, like the Liverpool dockers.

“Shortly after arriving in Edinburgh I saw an SSP stall on Princes street, campaigning against the occupation of Afghanistan. I enquired about getting involved and was warmly welcomed into the party. I’ve done stalls other comrades in Edinburgh, Livingston, Kirkcaldy, Falkirk, Bathgate, Perth, Inverness and Dunfermline, on issues as diverse as Afghanistan, Libya, the council tax and since the summer, ending Fuel Poverty.

“I am now committed to the socialist fight, having woken up to the causes of inequality and injustice, pain, misery and death that results from the capitalist market system. There is for me no option but to be active. As I begin to appreciate the struggle and sacrifice others have made to improve the lot of working people, pensioners, the unemployed and the vulnerable, I can’t sit back and

watch all those gains be lost and the hope of further progress extinguished so that a tiny minority of superficial, self-absorbed bigots can accumulate vast wealth through the belligerent division of humanity.

We need to convince working people that things can be changed, and that we do have the power to force change. Talking with people on the SSP stalls has reinforced my certainty that people in Scotland have the appetite for radical change. They have just been made to feel powerless by all the mainstream parties and their Mantra of, “there is no other way!” These public stalls are important, talking with people we open up the opportunity to discuss so much more, and show how sticking up for each other we can make great and wonderful changes. It’s exciting to be in a country where people are receptive to what we are saying and stand for.

“The SSP has an admirable record fighting for working class people; against the poll tax, stopping warrant sales, campaigning for free prescriptions, free school meals and free public transport as well as ending the slaughter of Imperialist wars and the threat of nuclear weapons.

“Independence offers exciting possibilities for Scotland and the chance to create an example people around the World can admire. Our Party has to rise to this opportunity. Activism is so important right now; stalls, public meetings, campaigning against fuel poverty, and, standing councillors who, like Jim Bolan, can demonstrate our commitment to working class communities throughout Scotland.”



# BUILD PENSIONS STRIKE ON 28 MARCH!

by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

**THE** fight to protect public sector pensions is far from over, despite the scandalous capitulation by leaders of the TUC, UNISON, GMB and some other unions.

Unions organising over a million workers are currently consulting and balloting members for united industrial action, including a one-day stoppage on 28 March. These include PCS, EIS, UCU and NUT, UNITE and the FBU.

And UNISON members in the Scottish NHS are staging a series of strikes, because unlike in the councils, where the SNP government postponed the misery of increased pension contributions, NHS staff face the immediate triple whammy of paying more, for longer, for lesser pensions.

## Reviving the struggle

Although not the same massive force as those who massed the picket lines and streets on November 30, this constitutes a substantially bigger united strike than that of June 2011, which helped to drag the likes of UNISON and GMB leaders into calling united action on N30.

It would pound the government on the eve of pension contribution increases that start this April, and would boost the efforts of the best activists in UNISON and GMB to salvage the situation in their own unions.

## Three-headed monster

The government's plans still mean a three-headed monster attacking millions of workers, who will have to pay more, for far longer, to get far less on retirement.

Fire-fighters face paying an extra £1,000 a year and working until a "normal pension age" of 60 - a frightening prospect for



anyone in need of fire rescue.

Civil servants will often have to treble their monthly pension contributions.

Our kids face the prospect of being taught by 68-year-old teachers, whose pensions will still be slashed after increased and prolonged contributions.

On average, the switch from RPI to CPI indexation of inflation for pensions will steal £15,000 from every public sector worker's pension, and this Tory theft has already robbed private pensions of about £75billion!

All because the Westminster Coalition wants to levy a double taxation on public sector workers, raking in billions more to fill some of the hole created by the 2008 bankers' bailout; not one penny of the increased workers' pension contributions will go to improve or fund their pensions!

Unity in action is the best weapon against Cameron and Clegg's pension robbers - and against an SNP government that has merely delayed increased contributions for council workers, and which has no control over the delayed retirement age nor the 20 per cent pension cut through switching inflation indexation from RPI to CPI.

## Sparks' victory shows we can win!

The recent outright victory for electrical and mechanical trades workers on the construction

sites is a tremendous and instructive boost to all who want to defeat the Great Pensions Robbery.

These workers faced 35 per cent pay cuts, de-skill ing, and attacks on their working conditions from a gang of seven big construction companies, many of which have been exposed for blacklisting and victimising trade union members.

The sparks stuck together, went on strike together, in defiance of the anti union laws, and often in defiance of those top union officials who were all too ready to capitulate. After 'unofficial' walkouts, street protests, recruitment drives among non-union members on the sites, and two strike ballots through their union UNITE, the capitalist gangster companies caved in one after another, agreeing real negotiations with the union - which the rank and file who led this fight will have representatives at.

If this relatively small workforce can defeat bosses hell bent on smashing wages, conditions and union organisation, a determined lead from the millions- strong public sector unions could drive back the Twin Tories and save workers' pensions.

## Workers' voice fury and determination

SSP members in these unions are joining with other

trade unionists in vigorous efforts to win sweeping majorities in consultative ballots for united strike action on 28 March, to rejuvenate this critical struggle over workers' incomes and deferred wages.

I spoke to a few of them on why they are campaigning for a huge strike that day.

"Despite everything the ConDems have said about the cuts saving the economy, the cuts in our public sector jobs and services have made things worse.

We now stand on the edge. Do we allow the government to tear down what has been built by generations of workers and face an uncertain future without these services, or do we defend our jobs, services and in fact our future?

We do not have the luxury of deciding whether or not we can take strike action. It is the only way to make a stand against the ruin the government is bringing on the people in this country."

- *JOHN JAMIESON, PCS NEC member*

"Whilst the situation in local government remains unclear, the opportunity to resist the ongoing attack on our pensions alongside other public sector workers should be seized. At the very least, UNISON branches can express solidarity to those on strike by sending delegations to demonstrations on 28 March."

- *COLIN TURBETT, chair, North Ayrshire UNISON (personal capacity)*

"November 30 was the first time Scottish teachers had struck in over a quarter of a century and the strike was virtually 100 per cent solid. This shows the iron determination to fight to defend our pensions. Quite simply, we can't afford not to strike, for the sake of our profession and the children we teach."

- *LANARKSHIRE EIS rep*

# DRIVE THE TORIES OUT!

## Demand decent jobs – not modern slavery!

by *Richie Venton,*  
*SSP national*  
*workplace organiser*

**THE** livid hatred for the Tories is palpable on the streets of Scotland. And it's growing, as David Cameron prepares to breeze in to Troon on Saturday 24 March to address the assembled conference of endangered species – also known as the Scottish Tory conference.

On countless occasions, people on the streets – especially women pensioners – have responded to our petition to 'keep the Tories out of Scotland' with comments like "I hope you've got a gun", "are you collecting for arms", and "shoot the bloody lot, I say".

Spoken by perfectly kindly, elderly women, but with passion behind the smiles, this reveals the deep-seated resentment at Cameron and his crew of wreckers, who have turned areas like Ayrshire into an industrial wasteland, a jobs desert.

### Grannies get their guns!

Older people remember what Cameron's mentor Maggie Thatcher did to industry and the mines; the devastation her Tory government



wreaked on working class communities. And they have heartfelt hatred for what Cameron's smug millionaires are now doing to a whole new generation of young people.

One working class woman in Pollok, Glasgow, perhaps captured the fury most concisely as she approached our SSP street stall against fuel poverty: "Fight fuel poverty – burn the government!"

### Troon STUC demo

The STUC demo against Cameron's visit to Troon on Saturday 24 March is an opportunity for

young people and the wider working class to vent their rage at an arrogant, smug Tory millionaire whose government and system is grinding millions down into poverty.

The SSP is spearheading the drive to keep Cameron out of Ayrshire, out of Scotland, out of the scene of his many crimes against ordinary, decent people.

Mass unemployment and mass poverty are stalking Scotland like modern plagues, condemning all generations to hardship. Countless people show eager support SSP protests

on the streets but then add, "Sorry, I haven't got any money to buy your paper".

Young people starting out on life's journey, and older workers thrown onto the scrap heap after decades of producing society's wealth, all too often have despair in their eyes and their faces.

A scandalous 230,000 Scots are jobless, 103,000 of them aged under 24.

### Criminal waste of talent

The most criminal aspect of this human waste is that there is absolutely no need for it. It is the product of the greed for profit at

the heart of the capitalist system, not some divinely ordained human condition.

Millions of socially useful jobs need doing – and the money is there to fund them, if only we had a government that challenged the rule of profit, the dictatorship of the millionaires.

Kids need more teachers and wrap-around childcare services, which could create umpteen jobs. Elderly and sick people need greater care and improved services, another potential source of jobs.

The dilapidated state of much housing, the horrendous waiting lists, and the appalling lack of high-standard home insulation, all cry out for the creation of tens of thousands of construction jobs and apprenticeships.

The poverty and social isolation caused by costly public transport, plus the pollution that threatens our planet, could be challenged by a free, expanded public transport system that in turn would vastly boost job opportunities. A serious programme of investment in publicly owned energy would be another source of sustainable, green, well-paid jobs.

## Modern slavery

The jobs need doing, the unemployed need work, and the money is easily available to pay decent wages - if instead of letting bankers and billionaires gorge themselves with obscene incomes and profits, we had a system that put people before profit.

The Tories' preferred system is a modern form of slavery. We live in a country where those in work are so low paid and terrified of losing their jobs that they handed their employers two billion hours of unpaid overtime last year! That's the equivalent of not being paid a penny for all your work from New Year's Day until 24 February this year! And it's the equivalent of a million full-time jobs... at least 100,000 new jobs in Scotland.

## Cut hours of work – not pay or jobs

Whilst 230,000 Scots are officially jobless, 260,000 of their fellow Scots are enduring the stress and strain of working more than 48 hours a week - mostly because of low hourly rates of pay, plus sheer fear of losing their job if they are not at the beck and call of employers who prefer this to employing extra staff.

A 35 hour maximum working week, but without a single penny loss in pay, could share out the work, create at

least 200,000 new jobs in Scotland, and virtually wipe out current unemployment.

But modern slavery is the Tories' preferred system.

Young people have been forced into Workfare schemes with multinationals, retail sector giants and even some 'charitable' employers - for precisely no wages, just their benefits and expenses - or else lose their benefits.

## Decent jobs for young people

The public outrage and protests against this youth slavery has forced a lot of profiteering companies to withdraw from the schemes. But there is absolutely no excuse or need for this. About 34,000 16-34 year-olds have been driven into this free labour outrage. But even the £500million in tax-dodging by Barclays bank, which public fury has forced the authorities into clawing back, could pay for all these 34,000 young people to have jobs at £8 an hour for a 35 hour week - real work experience and training!

And this £500m is a mere dewdrop in the Pacific Ocean compared with the £120billion a year avoided, evaded or simply unpaid by big business and the rich every single year; far less than half of one per cent of the stolen public taxes in the hands of a handful.

Put another way, even just recovering this £120billion - before even looking at increased taxation of the rich and big business - would be enough to fund 4.8million new jobs on £25,000 a year!

## Boost wages – to create jobs

One of the most cruel contradictions in this profit-crazed system is that by driving down workers' wages as a share of the wealth workers create, spending power is slashed, which further fuels the collapse of firms and the growth of even more grotesque levels of unemployment.

A recent study proves that the collapse in wages as a share of national wealth compared to its peak in 1978 means workers last year lost £60billion in wages!

Concretely, somebody on £12,000 a year right now

should be on £21,000 if wages had stayed at their 1978 levels as a proportion of national wealth produced (GDP). And a worker on £20,000 should be on £31,300.

Grinding workers down into poverty pay is the Tories' preferred system, but it worsens the state of the economy and swells the ranks of the unemployed. Capitalism doesn't work!

## Keep Cameron out of Scotland!

Join the STUC demo against youth unemployment at Tory conference in Troon on Saturday 24 March. Tell Cameron and his class of millionaire butchers to keep out of Scotland.

Demand a well-paid secure job, or proper training with a job at the end, or a living education grant, for all over 16.

Join the SSP in fighting for taxation

of the stinking rich and big business, and democratic public ownership of banks, energy, services, major industry and construction, so as to fund jobs for all and expand decent public services.

## Capitalism doesn't work

Capitalism creates chaos in people's lives. It means long hours of overwork for under-paid workers, alongside the hardship and despair of mass unemployment.

If capitalism can't 'afford' to guarantee socially useful, well-paid jobs for all, we can't afford the system.

We need to redouble the battle for socialism, where people work in co-operation, sharing out the work and the wealth, building a future worthy of the 21st century.

Join the Troon demo and join the SSP.

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# THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORIANS

*Setting An Agenda - Thomson, Dobb, Hill and the Communist Party Historians* by **Willie Thompson**. Socialist History Society, occasional pamphlet, no, 29, £3.00)

by Allan Armstrong

**WILLIE** Thompson, retired Professor of Contemporary History at Glasgow's Caledonian University, member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) from 1962 until its dissolution in 1991, has written an informative new pamphlet for the Socialist History Society (SSH). The SSH is the ecumenical socialist successor to the very influential Communist Party Historians Group (CPHG), first formed in 1946.

The work of many in the CPHG only became well known after these people left the CPGB in response to the inner party crisis, which faced the official Communist movement after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Indeed, the writings of Christopher Hill and of Edward (E.P.) Thompson, were so influential that they became standard works for many university history courses. This was before the shift to the Right, marked by the emergence of postmodernism, largely displaced them in academia.

What W. Thompson wants to establish is that the key elements of such historians' work were written whilst they were members of the CPGB before 1956, and that, furthermore, their work remains very relevant today. His pamphlet, *Setting An Agenda*, chooses CPHG writers, George Thomson, Maurice Dobb, and Christopher Hill to make his case.

G. Thomson wrote an early marxist approach to Classical Greece, entitled *Aeschylus and Athens*, in 1943. Why W Thompson chose G Thomson



for his pamphlet is not obvious. The most influential current marxist work, Geoffrey de Ste Croix's *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, dismisses Thomson. The fact that Thomson chose a very different political path from many in the CPHG, in response to 1956, and became an avowed supporter of Mao-Tse Tung, may partly explain his political marginalisation.

However, Thomson was also a fluent Irish speaker and had been professor of Greek at Galway University. He was influential in getting the autobiography of Blasket Islander, Maurice O'Sullivan, published - an interesting connection Thompson doesn't make, and would hardly register in the 'British Marxist' tradition!

Thompson is on much firmer ground in making his case when he highlights the work of Dobb's *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, written in 1946. This showed the key role of 'Britain' (meaning England) in the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism, and the role of class struggle in this process.

This work took on the standard, orthodox, self-serving, British university histories of the day. However, it also provoked a wider international historical debate on the Left. The American marxist, Paul Sweezy, editor of *Monthly Review* was involved.

He claimed that Dobb downplayed the predatory role of English/British imperialism in the rise of capitalism.

This debate has run and run, with Robert Brenner later reprising Dobb's role, whilst an international range of historians, including Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, James Blaut, Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein, have continued to emphasise the key role of the imperialism. Only in 2011 was there a serious attempt to partly reconcile these two approaches in Henry Heller's *The Birth of Capitalism - A Twenty First Century Approach*. This excellent book also draws on the experience of post-2008 global crisis to explain the history of capitalism.

In 1940, Christopher Hill wrote *The English Revolution, 1640*, to show that this was, in effect, Britain's bourgeois revolution, preparing the ground for first commercial and later industrial capitalism.

Hill's later books on the subject included biographies of Cromwell, Milton and Bunyan. He also uncovered the fascinating and previously largely hidden world of the Levellers, Ranters and Diggers.

They formed the extreme Left of the English Revolution. Hill made an impressive mark on mainstream history, forcing the Right on to the defensive. Later Marxist historians working in this

field, including those who became opposed to official Communism, such as Brain Manning, fully recognised the importance of Hill's work.

W Thompson omits E. Thompson, the other very influential CPHG historian, from his pamphlet. Perhaps this is because the work for which he became famous, was mostly published after he had left the CPGB. The introduction to E. Thompson's *History of the English Working Class* acknowledged that this book wasn't a history of the entire working class of these islands.

This was an advance upon believing that you have fully addressed the issue of the 'British working class' when you have written a history of English workers.

W Thompson does show an awareness in this pamphlet that even the best (former) CPGB historians had very little to say about Scotland's role in the rise of capitalism and imperialism, and the class resistance this produced. Some other one-time CPGB historians, Victor Kiernan and John Foster, living here, did attempt to partly remedy this.

However, despite their fascinating historical work in other fields - imperialism and the Chartists respectively- their CPGB-inherited British unionist framework, largely undermined their understanding in the Scottish historical arena. Such work has still largely to be undertaken and the necessary beginnings have been left to others.

Nevertheless, whatever the shortcomings of what has become known as 'British Marxism', those historians, whom Thomson highlights, did indeed perform a ground-breaking role, which socialist historians still remain indebted to. Thomson's pamphlet is a readable and reasonably priced introduction to their work.



# BOOK SEEKS MIDDLE GROUND ON SHERIDAN

*Tommy Sheridan: From Hero to Zero?: A Political Biography*, by **Gregor Gall**. Published by Welsh Academic Press

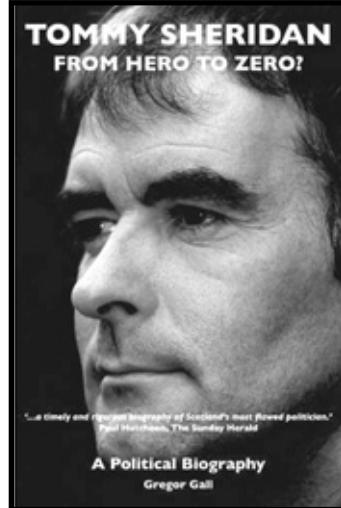
by *Allan Green*

**GREGOR** Gall's *Tommy Sheridan from Hero to Zero?:* a political biography of Tommy Sheridan aims to present "a study of the person, the personality and his politics and the dialectics between them". Gregor claims, "Putting together the voluminous interviews, the personal observation and the various secondary sources means that this biography comes as close as it (sic) possible in terms of source materials to being a definitive and authoritative biography as possible."

*Hero to Zero?* is certainly well-researched, with exhaustive references and footnotes, and it contains a lot of useful information. It is also an honest attempt to analyse and understand why "Tommy brought himself down not over NoW's allegations about his personal life but over the way he chose to deal with these."

Gregor Gall started his interviews and research for this book prior to 'Tommygate' - the title he gives the period after the 9 November 2004 SSP Executive Committee meeting asked Sheridan to step down as party convener, when Sheridan chose to use the courts, to coin Alan McCombes' phrase, and build a 'tower of lies'. Without Tommygate, the book would have been ready by late 2005 and it would, of course, have been a very different book. The consequent change of direction is perhaps a factor in explaining why the resulting work often appears disjointed and even inconsistent.

The strengths of this biography are in the coverage



of Sheridan's early life, his formative influences and his political development from the anti-poll tax campaign, through his years in Glasgow Council to the early years of the Scottish Parliament. *Hero to Zero?* also deals with the dynamics of the rise of the SSP as a collective campaigning party and the positive and crucial role played by Sheridan at this time.

*Hero to Zero?* is mistaken when it implies there was an agreement within the SSP that Sheridan could take the libel action from the time he stood down as party convener. Sheridan was certainly asked to stand down for intending to go to the courts and lie. However, the party leadership repeatedly tried to dissuade him from pursuing his action in the courts.

Gregor argues that Sheridan's "faulty political calculation" over Tommygate was a consequence of him "making his destiny synonymous with that of socialism in Scotland". Yet the evidence presented for the Tommygate period just doesn't back him up. In Gregor's own words "between 2004 and 2010 he spent more time fighting the left than he did the right."

Gregor argues, with hindsight, that the SSP should have spiked Sheridan's guns in November 2004, publishing the Executive Committee minutes detailing why Sheridan was asked to stand down as convener. And with hindsight, few will argue. But at the time, most party members, myself included, felt that Sheridan was still motivated, at least in part, by promoting the socialist cause. Sheridan even told Alan McCombes that he would drop the legal action if NoTW did not back down. In November 2004, there was probably no one who imagined that Sheridan would, within 18 months, in pursuit of his flawed legal action, devote most of his political energy towards attacking the SSP with such ferocity and venom.

*Hero to Zero?* catalogues many accounts of Sheridan's sexist behaviour, asks if he is a misogynist and then leaves the question hanging. The emphasis is on accounts of Sheridan as a 'sexual predator' during the Militant era. Gregor does not draw on material documented elsewhere in the book that could be pertinent; such as Sheridan's declarations of intent to 'destroy' women with whom he had a sexual relationship but who refused to perjure themselves in court on his behalf. It also ignores the public humiliation that they suffered at the hands of Sheridan over two court cases.

When the book considers the question of the 'cult of the personality' around Sheridan it again concentrates on the pre-Tommygate period. Gregor says it is doubtful if Sheridan himself consciously nurtured this status at this time. Instead, the emphasis is on the "heavy responsibility" of the SSP and its forerunners in promoting

Sheridan in what is described in the book as "a bargain with the devil". Indeed, it has been widely acknowledged in the SSP that it made a mistake in promoting so much of the socialist message through one individual.

Yet, the biography does not seriously examine the 'cult of the personality' around Sheridan from the split in the SSP onwards. There is a recognition that most of Tommy's supporters knew he was lying throughout Tommygate. The biography details how, time after time, Sheridan bounced his followers into a course of action that even they did not initially support. Even amongst those who went on to form Solidarity, outside his immediate circle of family and friends, few initially believed that Sheridan should take out his libel action. Almost none of Sheridan's supporters wanted to split the SSP but they still followed when a split was declared by Sheridan. Gregor explains this by saying "...his supporters thought they were defending the Tommy of old, not the Tommy of new."

Gregor concludes that the biography has "pursued a middle way" as it is neither for nor against Sheridan. He states that he is adopting the dialectical method by recognising Sheridan as being simultaneously both hero and zero. This conclusion does not seem to sufficiently take cognisance of much of the evidence in the book that, with Tommygate, and in particular after Sheridan's open attacks on the SSP from May 2006 onwards, the balance between Sheridan being motivated by actions for the benefit of the socialist movement and by being motivated by narrow self-interest, decisively and qualitatively changed.

# LAKES AND VOLCANOES OR SMOKE AND MIRRORS

by Joyce McCracken, in  
Central America

**IT'S** the land of lakes and volcanoes. How commentators and politicians love to paint Nicaragua in such vivid, even romantic terms.

True, Nicaragua has the two biggest inland lakes in Central America, shiny and silvery under the tropical sun. The steep sloping volcanoes of the central and Pacific regions define the skyline, mile after mile after mile.

But let's colour this reality with some contrasting tones. One of the fresh water lakes has sharks, said to be up to 11 feet long.

Most of the volcanoes are inactive. Some like the uppity little Cerro Negro, without your bye or leave, can spit out fire and smoke, rocks and lava. Frequently the volcanoes rumble, the earth trembles, then nothing more; well, sometimes.

## The good news is

At times political life appears to reflect the physical reality. Commentators and politicians have been at pains to point to the achievements Nicaragua has made during the presidency of Daniel Ortega.

He signed Nicaragua into the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America (ALBA). An early outcome of that deal was that the country's electrical energy system started sending power to homes and workplaces.

Sixteen years of neo liberal governments had led the power generating and distribution systems into frequent break downs. Through ALBA, Nicaragua was able to buy Venezuelan fuel oil at affordable rates.

Road building programs before seemed mostly to



ROSARIO MURILLO AND DANIEL ORTEGA

benefit the south of the country. This is traditional conservative and liberal big farm country.

Now roads in the west and north are starting to open up the countryside. That helps the smaller, rural producers get their farm products to market and ensures a flow of income back to the countryside.

Programs like Zero Hunger and Zero Usury, while materially benefiting poor families, are channelled through women.

Under the Sandinista government illiteracy has been pushed down from over 20 per cent to just over 3 per cent. School fees have been eliminated.

## Smoke and mirrors

So why is everyone not pleased?

Like the rumbling volcano that can make the earth tremble and sometimes might just erupt into something more threatening, there are rumblings of criticism below Nicaragua's political surface. That is, even within the Sandinista party.

At the end of last year the mayor of the city of Leon reigned. It wasn't a case of

Manuel Calderon jumping before he was pushed. He was told to jump. Eventually a Sandinista party functionary made it in front of a TV camera to say the ex mayor had not negotiated with town hall workers.

Few people bought that line. Calderon, a former military man, was not known for his diplomatic skills. He was said to have had a blazing row with Rosario Murillo, wife of President Ortega and Co-ordinator of the Council for Communication and Citizenship.

Rosario Murillo holds no elected position in government, but she is seen and heard on the nation's TV channels more than the president. And like Manuel Calderon, there is a string of reputable Sandinistas who have fallen foul of her.

The party has nominated, or as they say in Nicaragua, has "fingered", its own candidate for mayor of Leon in the November municipal election. Other candidates have been fingered for different municipalities.

In the past the Sandinistas have made much of how their candidates for public office

were selected through pre election primaries. Not any more it seems.

Rosario in her nightly discourses about the state of the nation waxes lyrical about husband Daniel and the "people presidency". In some references she is described as a poet.

In February another woman, a Sandinista activist from the western municipality of Quezalguaque was on the radio. She didn't mince her words. She said the Sandinistas where she lived wanted to select their own candidate for the elections.

In the barrio of Calvario in Leon there are reports of a "Street Assembly", denouncing the fingering of a candidate, not of their choice, to run for the office of mayor.

This pattern has been repeated in Masaya, south of the capital and other parts of the country. The internal democracy of the Sandinista party is in question.

Unimpressed by the smoke and mirrors emanating from their TVs many Nicaraguans are asking the question. Is the person the people elected the real president or is it some other unelected person?

# PUTIN'S VICTORY SPARKS NEW PROBLEMS

by Bill Bonnar

**VLADIMIR** Putin clearly won the Russian presidential election. Even allowing for voting irregularities; he was the overall winner. Yet hundreds of thousands of ordinary Russians continue to campaign against Putin's rule and the processes which allowed him to claim such an overwhelming victory. It is these processes which need to be examined to explain his victory and the anger of so many people.

Russia is not a democracy in any meaningful way. It is an 'elective dictatorship' which manipulates the political process on behalf of a powerful ruling elite to secure the result acceptable to that elite.

It does this in three ways. First it has almost total control of the media; in particular, television. Here there is not even the pretence of objectivity one gets with the BBC. In Russia, the media is a propaganda machine under the direct control of the President and bombards the Russian people with pro-Putin coverage.

The message is always the same and blasted out 24 hours per day; 7 days per week. Putin is the greatest thing since sliced bread, he is the saviour of Russia and if you don't support him the country will collapse into disaster. At the same time, it constantly denigrates all opposition creating the climate that to even vote for such people would be unpatriotic.

Second, Putin has unlimited funds to spend of electioneering paid for by the state. It's a bit like the Tory election campaign in Britain being paid for by the Treasury; only the Treasury could not afford the lavish



**PROTEST: anti-Putin forces gather in Moscow**

sums which the Putin camp spends. It literally runs into billions of roubles. At the same time, spending by opposition parties is scrupulously monitored.

Third, Putin's supporters control the administration of the elections and work tirelessly to produce the 'correct' result. In fact, in a startling recent interview with journalists, current President Medvedev admitted that the Communist Party actually won the 1996 presidential election and that it was only through widespread 'adjustments' of the vote that allowed Yeltsin to become president. Of course, having secured the presidency the constitution was amended by Yeltsin allowing the President to rule with absolute power until the next election when the process is repeated again.

It is this undemocratic process which has motivated so many to take to the streets in protest and also creates a climate of apathy among millions more who see voting as a waste of time. At the same time it has to be realised that Putin does tap into the deep lying concerns of the Russian people. This dates back to the fall of the Soviet Union and the disastrous first

decade of the post-soviet era.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was not like the collapse of socialism in countries like Poland or Czechoslovakia. In these countries the system was extremely unpopular with mass movements in opposition to it. In the Soviet Union this was simply not the case. The vast majority of Russians supported or at least accepted the system to a greater or lesser extent and there was no mass movement in opposition. After the collapse most Russians felt that they were living in a defeated nation and the years that followed were disastrous but just about every definition of that term. The economy collapsed and what was left was effectively looted.

Social services disintegrated, peoples savings were wiped out and most Russians saw a catastrophic drop in living standards. On top of this the state effectively collapsed, law and order broke down and many Russian cities became like the wild west. All presided over by mentally ill, alcoholic president whose main contribution was to make sure that the new Russia never

developed as a democracy.

The rise of Putin was in many ways a reaction to this. He stabilised the economy by bringing some of the major industries, particularly oil and gas, back into effective national ownership after the disastrous privatisations. Rising oil prices meant that the government had money to invest and while the economy still exists at a much lower level than it did twenty years ago it is still a lot better than the Yeltsin years. He also projects strong government and a sense of Russian nationalism popular after the humiliations of the nineties.

Putin may have won the election but the issues which bring demonstrators onto the streets are still very much alive. Not just the undemocratic nature of the political process but the poverty, inequality and corruption now a daily part of Russian life.

Modern Russia has been described as a 'mafia state' and a 'kleptocracy'. Both terms are accurate. The country is ruled by and on behalf of a ruling elite who are basically gangsters. They own huge parts of the old soviet economy looted during the free-for-all of the nineties and have direct control over the government. Ironically, many people voted for Putin because they wanted a strong leader who would stand up to the oligarchs and gangsters, not realising that he effectively works for them.

Yet millions now see through the charade and are beginning to challenge the whole basis of post-soviet Russia. This year marks the 95th anniversary of the Russian Revolution; an anniversary that will not be lost on the government or the people.



## EXPOSE BRITAIN'S WARFARE STATE

by Ken Ferguson

**ANOTHER** six soldiers meet a horrific death as their light tank is blown apart in Afghanistan taking the British military death toll to over 400.

In Jamaica Prince Harry bows his head, while in London Cameron solemnly intones the usual line about sacrifice duty etc.

Generals and military chiefs sigh and regret the loss while underlining their determination to "get the job done" while on *Newsnight* pro war politicians resemble rabbits lost in Paxman's headlights.

All of this seems a world away from the debate about Independence and that's the way the unionists would dearly like to keep it.

However for those who want independence to be more than a transfer of the present pro war pro capitalist set up from London to Edinburgh it is a central issue.

The 300 plus year history of the British union is a history of war, plunder, bloodshed and death and Scots have been intimately involved in that process as the cutting edge of imperialism.

In contrast to the tartan myth of the dashing Scots taking on the world lies the reality of



dirty colonial wars across the planet which left a trail of plunder, repression and brutality.

To break with this macabre dance of death independence needs to end Scotland's role as cannon fodder for war, set up a democratic republic and become a force for peace not war.

However those supporting this radical new course need to be clear about the Herculean task that it represents.

The British state, over 300 years, has perfected its ability to divide and rule giving away power here, partitioning countries there playing off one religious or ethnic group against another, all to keep its power intact.

The stakes in the current independence battle are, for the

British state, of the very highest.

Not only are they desperate to keep the spoils of North Sea oil and gas but they fear the loss of their Trident base on the Clyde and what that means for their power base internationally.

Since the dawn of the 21st century the British state has spent over £10 billion on war, sown death and misery in Iraq and Afghanistan, bombed Libya and is gearing up for a war on Iran.

Above all else the Westminster consensus across the major parties backs this continuing role of military intervention in support of "British interests" wrapped in humanitarian rhetoric but aimed at protecting big business.

The welfare state may be in decline but Westminster is

determined to keep the 300 year old warfare state alive and well.

To challenge this deadly consensus means ensuring that the issue of the UK's addiction to war and how Scotland can take another direction is a key part of the referendum campaign.

Given that the SNP has a central role in this campaign its ambiguous attitude to the British forces—wanting Trident out while supporting Scottish regiments and RAF bases - is a serious weakness.

There needs to be absolute clarity that independence needs not just a independent parliament but one breaking with the monarchy, the power structures built up since 1707 and the military machine which sustains it.

As one political philosopher said "You can peel an onion layer by layer but you can skin a Tiger claw by claw".

For independence to deliver real change it has to break not just with the Westminster green benches but the complex of economic and military power that underpins it.

Anything less will run the danger of simply changing the postcodes of the politicians running the show in the interests of big business.



## 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)

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