



# Scottish Socialist VOICE

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# SNP AND LABOUR GAIN - BUT DID THE VOTERS WIN?

by John McAllion

ALEX Salmond said he was delighted with the results of Scotland's council elections.

With all 32 council results declared, he argued that the SNP had polled more votes, gained more seats and now had more councillors elected than any other party in Scotland.

Johann Lamont, on the other hand, saw the results very differently. Labour now had the largest group in 14 of Scotland's councils compared to the SNP's seven. Labour had outright control of four Scottish councils compared to the SNP's two.

The electoral tide, she crowed, is going out on Alex Salmond's SNP and, by implication, is turning in Labour's favour.

Both parties pointed to big city

wins as evidence of their electoral dominance. In Glasgow, an SNP challenge that threatened to end decades of Labour rule in the city never materialised. The SNP had fielded more than twice as many candidates there as in 2007, hoping to win an outright majority on the city council.

They had talked up Glasgow as a key electoral battleground. At their Spring Conference in the city, Salmond had brought cheering delegates to their feet with his proclamation that the SNP were coming to storm this long-time Labour stronghold.

In the end, only 27 of the SNP's 43 candidates were elected in the city. By contrast, Labour had 44 of its 45 candidates elected and was back in power with a comfortable majority.

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Glasgow Labour leader, Gordon Matheson, gleefully commented: "The SNP juggernaut has landed in a Glasgow ditch."

As Labour activists hugged each other in celebration at the count, their SNP counterparts looked on glumly, some of them in tears. Their party had failed to land a political glove on Glasgow Labour.

Dundee, however, told a very different story. Thirteen years ago, Labour had an electoral stranglehold on the city. All four of the city's parliamentarians were Labour. The Lord Provost was Labour. A majority Labour administration ran the city council.

Under George Galloway's stewardship, the local Labour Party had led the national fight against the sale of council houses in the early 1980s, and briefly won the city the reputation of being the people's socialist republic of Dundee.

After the counting of last Thursday's votes, Dundee had its first ever majority SNP administration in the city. It will soon have its first SNP Lord Provost. Both of the city's MSPs are already SNP, as is one of the city's two MPs. Indeed, so demoralised is Dundee Labour that they did not even field enough candidates to constitute a majority administration on the council. Labour had thrown in the electoral towel before a single vote had been cast.

The statistical claims and counter claims of Scotland's now two dominant political parties will undoubtedly continue to roll out as the council elections fade and the focus shifts to the launch of the campaigns around the independence referendum.

However, before that shift finally takes place, there are features of these elections that need to be kept in mind. Especially, as the big two parties would rather we ignored them.

Labour's Glasgow triumph was achieved on a turn-out of less than a third of the city's voters. Two out of every three voters in the city stayed at home.

Dundee did little better with less than 37 per cent of voters bothering to go to the polls. Indeed, in 12 of the council areas across Scotland - including Aberdeen, Fife and North

Lanarkshire - the turn-out was under 40 per cent. These elections and Scotland's two big parties simply failed to engage most voters.

More importantly, in the course of their campaigns, both parties failed to address the most important problem that will face SNP, Labour and other newly elected councillors in the years ahead.

Both parties littered their election manifestos with new spending commitments covering everything from council tax freezes to improved childcare and new training and job opportunities for young people.

Neither addressed the elephant in the room that is the massive cut to Scottish public spending timetabled to take place during the lifetime of the newly elected councils.

Over the last two budgets, and

with a comprehensive spending review squeezed in between, the ConDem Coalition in Westminster have announced an unprecedented cut of well over £100billion to Government spending programmes.

These cuts are scheduled to be made over a five-year period. As the new councillors take up office, we will be at the end of year one of that five-year programme.

New councillors will now face four more years of savage cuts to public spending during which between 80-90 per cent of the announced cuts will have to be made. A leading economic think tank has already predicted that Scotland now faces "five more years of pain" with our unemployment rate outstripping the UK's and, by 2016, hitting its highest level since the early 1990s.

According to the think tank Scotland's unemployment rate will be exacerbated by our dependence upon public sector employment and by the Coalition's policy of large scale cuts to public sector jobs. Westminster will expect Scotland's councillors to make many of those cuts.

Neither SNP nor Labour-led councils will refuse to carry out Westminster's diktat.

Each will blame the other for the job losses and service reductions demanded. As they trade insults, Labour in Glasgow and the SNP in Dundee will do as they are told and make the cuts.

Neither party is capable of providing the political leadership now required to organise resistance to the cuts. That kind of leadership will have to come from elsewhere.

# MAY 10 STRIKE A ROARING SUCCESS



**STRIKE!** some May 10 picket numbers were much larger than even November 30

by *Richie Venton, SSP National Workplace Organiser*

MAY 10's strike was a roaring success. Most civil service offices had at least 90 per cent of PCS members honouring the strike. In the Courts it was 95 per cent.

At the MoD in Glasgow 599 out of 600 members were on strike! - with soldiers covering their jobs at an extra 40 per cent cost. Numerous offices were shut.

Scottish prison officers also joined strike by public sector workers. About 2,500 prison officers in Scotland also joined the strike with staff walking out despite a voluntary with the Scottish Prison Service not to strike. It is illegal for prison officers in

England and Wales to strike, but not in Scotland.

Picket numbers at Scottish Government offices were much larger than even on November 30. As John Jamieson, PCS NEC member told me: "People might not be champing at the bit to strike, but they have been pushed and pushed and refuse to take any more. Losing a day's pay in pension contributions a few days ago highlights what we face."

And as Clare, a Glasgow Benefits worker told me: "The government gets up to all sorts of tricks.

"By changing the tax threshold, despite the increased pension contribution some people were actually a few pounds better off this month, but they know worse is to come and we had only about 80 out of 1,500 crossing the picket line."

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# ARE THE TARTAN TORIES BACK?

by Campbell Martin

IN the early-to-mid 1970s the Labour Party branded the SNP as 'Tartan Tories'. The name stuck because it was, essentially, accurate.

Back then, the SNP's fledgling electoral successes were centred in north-east Scotland. Areas like Angus and Banff & Buchan saw Tory voters switch allegiance to the Nationalists, which delivered parliamentary constituencies to the SNP and provided a new dawn for the party after the light from Winnie Ewing's Hamilton victory of 1967 had been extinguished just three years later.

Through its Westminster peak in 1974, when eleven MPs were elected, the SNP remained a moderate, centre-right political party, only breaking from that position with the establishment of the '79 Group that included 'lefties' such as Alex Salmond, Roseanna Cunningham and Kenny MacAskill.

Into the 1980s, and in the face of a devastating onslaught from the right-wing Thatcher Government in London, the SNP was reborn as a moderate, centre-left party in what it then liked to describe as 'the social-democratic mould'.

As the SNP re-positioned to the left, the Labour Party zoomed past it in the other direction, finally transforming itself into a clone of the Conservatives. From this new position on

the right of the political spectrum, Labour's 'Tartan Tories' jibe directed at the SNP no longer held any credibility.

The SNP was one of the organisations that helped bring down the hated Poll Tax, while the official Labour line told people to pay it.

By the 1990s and the ascendancy of Tony Blair, the SNP was firmly established to the left of New Labour. In one newspaper interview Alex Salmond even went as far as describing the Nats as a socialist party.

Today, the SNP still maintains it is a social-democratic party, holding a position on the centre-left of politics but, as the saying goes, actions speak louder than words, and the actions of the contemporary SNP suggest the 'Tartan Tories' description could once again be appropriate.

## Reality

A core policy of the SNP is to reduce Corporation Tax to 12.5 per cent. This, the party claims, would attract inward investment to Scotland and create jobs.

The reality, however, would simply see multi-national corporations set-up in Scotland to maximise their profits.

Jobs created would be at minimum wage level, with the taxpayer providing subsidies through Tax Credits and other benefits, while the companies saved millions-of-pounds through paying less tax, the only

beneficiaries of which would be a small, elite group of directors and share-holders, many of whom would not be liable for Scottish or UK taxes.

Under the SNP's Corporation Tax plan, Scottish & Southern Energy, a company that has hiked gas and electricity prices to such an extent that many Scots can't afford to heat their homes in winter, would 'save' in the region of £330million a year through paying less tax.

Another major beneficiary of the SNP's pro-big business agenda would be Brian Souter's Stagecoach transport group - the company's tax bill would be slashed by around £25million a year. Mr Souter is, of course, one of the SNP's largest donors.

While still clinging to pretensions of being a moderate, centre-left party, the SNP National Conference in August 2006 passed a resolution calling for the re-regulation of the bus industry. Rank and file SNP members recognised the damage done by Thatcher's de-regulation of bus services in the 1980s: routes were slashed, smaller companies were swallowed-up by larger predatory competitors, jobs were lost and, in many cases, rural and peripheral city communities were effectively cut-off after early evening, when services became 'non-profitable'.

With the passing of the resolution at its National Conference, re-regulation of the bus industry

became SNP policy. However, seven months later, in March 2007, Stagecoach owner Brian Souter donated £500,000 to the SNP. At the time, Mr Souter said the money was to help level the financial playing field and allow the SNP to fight the May 2007 Scottish Parliament Election against British Unionist parties part-funded from London. The multi-millionaire subsequently gave the SNP a further £125,000.

## Souter

The policy to re-regulate the bus industry did not feature in the party's Manifesto for the 2007 Election, nor has it been implemented by Nationalist Governments, and Brian Souter continues to help fund the SNP.

Recently, we have also seen an aide to the SNP leader apparently commit Scotland's First Minister to lobbying on behalf of the disgraced News Corporation group as it attempted to take complete control of satellite broadcaster BSkyB.

Alex Salmond says he was only acting in the interests of Scottish jobs. Others argue the SNP leader was cosyng-up to Rupert Murdoch in pursuit of a political endorsement from one of his newspapers, the right-wing *Sun*, which supports the Tories in England.

No genuine party of the centre-left would keep the company of Brian Souter and Rupert Murdoch.

# 'TOUGHEST TIMES IN 80 YEARS'

by Colin Fox

AFTER losing the London Mayoral election to Boris Johnson, Labour's Ken Livingstone reflected on the foreboding he felt for working people in what he described as "these, the toughest times in 80 years". Strictly speaking, he may be understating the collapse in living standards suffered in the 1970s and 1980s - but for working people, there are similarities with 'the hungry '30s'.

Food Banks provide emergency supplies to thousands of families struggling to feed themselves. Youth unemployment, already at record levels, is set to rise further as hundreds of thousands of school leavers seek work.

Millions of people across Britain are facing prolonged hardship and inequalities as bad as those seen in the decade before World War Two.

## Savage cuts

This issue was the 'elephant in the room' during last week's local elections as the mainstream parties barely mentioned it. The Scottish Socialist Party did. Our material condemned the Coalitions 'austerity programme' and savage cuts, and warned of worse to come.

In the elections, Labour gained disaffected Lib Dem supporters and won back part of the vote they lost to the SNP last year. But the SNP still emerged as the biggest party in Scotland with 425 councillors, although they did not match last year's stunning advances.

Despite seeing its share of the vote fall from 45 per cent last year to 33 per cent now, Salmond 'spun' their results by saying they made progress on 2007 (the last Council elec-



**WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION: SSP want to replace the Council Tax with a fairer system that will tax the rich, not the poor**

tions). The performance of SNP councils that implemented cuts in services undoubtedly cost them dear. And many people who voted Salmond last year have 'returned home to Labour' as Ed Milliband put it.

Labour, in a sign of things to come, were anxious to 'spin' the Scottish results as a rejection of Independence.

The truth is, the electorate choose to punish the Coalition for its austerity programme and falling living standards by voting for both Labour and the SNP. Between them they hold almost 900 of the 1,300 seats available.

And yet both parties support 80 per cent of the Coalition cuts and will implement them at local level. Neither party offers any answer to falling living standards. Neither Labour nor the SNP offer a real alternative to the hated Coalition, far less an organised fight back, and we will see that reflected all too clearly across Scotland in

the months to come.

Support for the Left in these elections was poor and it is right we acknowledge that.

With the honourable exception of Scottish Socialist Party councillor Jim Bolland's terrific re-election in West Dunbartonshire there was little to cheer in the 1300 contests. But that situation will change. The mood of working people is angry, not at us, but at the situation in which they find themselves.

Last Thursday, people chose what appears to be the easiest option - this is no cause to condemn them or to lose faith in socialist ideas. The SSP will continue to patiently explain that the neo-liberal, free market, global, corporatist model is behind what is eating away at living standards, and Labour and the SNP unfortunately both tied their colours to that particular mast a long time ago.

They are part of the problem, not the solution, and they

will dutifully do what they are told by corporate paymasters like Rupert Murdoch. That picture and its full implications will become clearer and clearer in the battles to come.

The acid test for the left then is to articulate the anxieties of working class people and further develop our economic and social programme for getting out of this recession.

Allied to that, we need to be at the forefront of every protest, strike, march, rally and example of dissent to ensure working people are encouraged to place their faith, not in neo-liberal charlatans who will betray them, but the Left. The Left, we must remind them, understand that only a steadfast commitment to addressing the root cause of the problem will do.

In the meantime we resolve to work harder to outline our 'narrative', our explanation of what is going on in society today, and what the Left is for.

## Action

We must give a clear explanation of the current economic and political crisis, and lay out a programme explaining how things can be turned around, how working people's increasing pauperisation can be reversed.

The Scottish Socialist Party programme has commitments to a Scottish Service Tax, a 'Tobin tax' on financial transactions and many other proposals designed to redistribute Scotland's enormous wealth. These are the foundation stones upon which we will build the forces necessary to encourage action and protest activity in working people.

The Left's ideas need to be more present in the public debate too and we must work harder to ensure that goal is achieved.

# Winds of change gather pace in Europe

by *Bill Bonnar*

**THE** winds of change are in the air. Across Europe people are responding to the great con trick. Four years ago, years of recklessness by the banks and uncontrolled rampant greed by the rich brought the capitalist system to its knees.

Governments all over Europe came to their rescue pumping hundreds of billions of pounds of public money into shoring up the banks and keeping the economy afloat.

Then, through a giant leap of imagination, the problem was not the banks, or the hard pressed rich or capitalism but unaffordable levels of public expenditure.

## Attack

An all out attack on wages, services and pensions followed with rocketing unemployment and inflation and a collective lowering of living standards for working people who were now taking the blame for the crisis.

With Europe stuck firmly in the grip of recession and no real strategy by right wing governments other than 'stick with austerity in the hope that the system will, sometime in the future, miraculously emerge from crisis', the answer from the people of Europe is one of rejection.

Rejection of the idea that they are to blame for this crisis, rejection of an austerity strategy which attacks their living standards while protecting the rich, and a search for radical alternatives.

In France, the fracturing of the right wing vote with the emergence of the National Front and the victory of Socialist Party candidate Françoise Hollande on an anti-austerity programme has given voice to millions of French people who are now saying 'enough is enough'.

In Greece, the collapse of the New Democracy/Pasok Coalition and the emergence of powerful Left forces in parliament represent a total rejection of the austerity programme of the last few

No doubt, part of this was to appease a strong and re-emerging Left in France which found voice in the form of Presidential candidate; Jean-Luc Melenchon. Representing the Left Front (Communist Party and Left Party), Melenchon ran on an unashamed anti-capitalist ticket.

His final total of almost 4 million votes (11 per cent) signified a major breakthrough for the Left and represents great hope for the future particularly when the re-

In Greece, the election represented a dramatic defeat for the pro-austerity coalition around New Democracy and Pasok, and has thrown the entire strategy into crisis both in Greece and across Europe.

The Greek people have shown that they want to embrace a radical alternative as reflected in the votes of Left parties - Radical Left Coalition: 1.2 million votes (19 per cent), Communist Party: 540,000 votes (9 per cent), Democratic Left: 390,000 votes (6 per

thing else. For the Right as a whole, democratic government has failed to deliver their agenda of cuts for working people while protecting the interests of the rich. In a country with a long history of military coups, the Greek ruling class will increasingly look towards this option to protect their interests.

Perhaps the most important thing to come from these elections and others is the emergence of a distinctly anti-capitalist/pro-socialist programme to deal with the crisis of capitalism. Although different in separate countries, core ideas are emerging.

The need to make the rich pay for their crisis through higher and more effective taxation, the need to protect jobs and welfare and to promote employment and growth, the need to tackle poverty and inequality and to control the excesses of capitalism.

## Rich elite

More than this, the questioning of the very validity of the capitalist system itself. If all it has to offer is austerity, unemployment, inflation and cuts to vital public services, if its main aim is to protect the interests of a rich elite, if its economic strategy is based simply on the need to placate the markets and its vision for the future is a society fractured by inequality, poverty, ethnic division and the destruction of the environment; then surely there must be a better alternative.

There has never been a better time to put socialism firmly back on the agenda.



**ALEXIS TSIPRAS: Greece's Radical Left coalition won 1.2million votes**

years and a yearning for something different.

The French result throws up a number of different issues.

The Socialist Party, although broadly sharing most of the agenda, objectives and policies of the Right, articulated many populist Left policies, including greater taxation of the rich, a strategy for growth and jobs, renegotiation of the EU fiscal pact, troops out of Afghanistan and targeted increases in public expenditure; particularly in education.

ality of the Hollande/Socialist Party government begins to kick in.

The other major issue was the emergence of the neo-fascist National Front as a central player in French politics. Although making strenuous efforts to wrap itself in a cloak of respectability, core policies including draconian law and order measures, and an unashamedly racist approach to immigration revealed a darker side of French society brought to the surface by the economic crisis.

cent). Together they form a bloc of 153 elected MPs, around a third of the total.

Also emerging was the neo-nazi Golden Dawn Party with 440,000 votes (7 per cent) and 18 seats.

If the French National Front try to hide their fascism through a sophisticated PR machine, Golden Dawn project themselves as openly fascist and proud of it, complete with Nazi style salutes and the rhetoric that goes with it.

However, their emergence represents some-

# BENEFIT REFORMS: NOTHING BUT THE SAME OLD CUTS

by Sandra Webster

IN April of this year, despite the protests of many charities, the Welfare Reform Bill passed successfully through the House Of Lords.

Let's be honest, this not about reform. One of the agendas of the ConDems lead by Cameron and Osborne was to launch an attack on the standards of living of some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society while the bonuses paid to rich bankers hardly gets a mention.

## Impact

The changes which began last month are just beginning to impact on families. Couples with children now have to work 24 hours a week to receive Working Families' Tax Credit.

In an ideal world where there is full employment, it might be easy to ask an employer for additional hours but in this economic climate, many employers are asking their workers to work harder and reduce their hours.

So for many there is no chance of increasing their time at work. The assumption from the houses on the hills is that the partner not currently working can get a little job, not more than a couple of hours a day.

Their rhetoric makes us imagine that thousands of such jobs exist but JobCentres report that up to 30 people are chasing each job vacancy that exists.

Changes to payments for people with disability began at the beginning of May.

After the "successes" of a few pilot areas, Incapacity Benefit will be replaced by Employment Support Allowance (ESA).

People are currently being assessed by a private French company called ATOS to determine whether they should receive ESA support allowance, where there is no need to work, ESA with work-related activities, or be placed onto normal Jobseeker's Allowance.



**OUT OF TOUCH: Ian Duncan Smith accused disabled workers of 'just sitting around, making coffee all day...'**

There are many concerns about the Fit For Work interviews being conducted by ATOS.

Staff who are not medically trained make decisions about individuals' ability to work without speaking to the medical professionals who know them best.

The Disability Alliance estimates that roughly 40 per cent of decisions about fitness for work are successful at the appeal stage. This has not stopped some people becoming more

desperate and worried about their situation.

Paul Reekie, a poet from Leith who had struggled with mental health conditions, did not leave a suicide note when he took his own life but at his desk he left two letters. One informing him that his housing benefit had been stopped, and another that his incapacity benefit had been withdrawn.

Edinburgh GP Dr Carty spoke about Paul's case and

vulnerable will be protected and this is not a cut but a means to support the most vulnerable.

However, their own figures estimate that they expect to make savings in the region of 28 per cent. Again charities are concerned about people with more hidden disabilities such as mental health issues and learning disabilities, and how they are being portrayed as "scroungers."

## Rich scroungers

Meanwhile the very rich scrounge off the state in a legal manner by avoiding paying tax. They came for people with disabilities first but the housing benefit changes which come into play will have the most impact on many people's lives. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) report that up to 670,000 people will be affected.

These will include your neighbours and people you know, perhaps even yourself if you live in a council or housing association house, or even a private let.

If a family or single person live in a house deemed larger than what they are deemed to need, their housing benefit will be reduced. This is going to affect all from single people to larger families.

There is a shortage of housing designed for one person and are not available in many areas. In such cases, it is likely the tenant will receive a 14 per cent cut in rent for one room, 25 per cent for more than one, and be expected to make up the shortfall.

This is going to mean a

# Sandinista leader dies

by Sam Gordon, Nicaragua

**OBITUARY**  
**Tomas Borge**  
**Martinez**  
**1930 - 2012**

huge increase in people going into rent arrears with possible eviction actions taking place. Even Boris Johnson condemned this, along with Shelter, who fear there will be a large increase in homelessness.

The icing on the cake will be the introduction of Universal Credit which everyone will receive by October 2017. This will mean a benefit cap in line with the salary of a working family. However, all state benefits such as housing benefit and Personal Independence Pension and Bereavement Allowance will be taken into account to simplify the system.

This will also simplify the way that thousands will gently slide into poverty. The CPAG estimate that thousands of children will be affected. The most vulnerable affected again. The architect of these changes, Iain Duncan Smith, may use the language of equality and protecting the needy but we know what his and the other millionaires' agenda is all about.

## Shameful

Talking about the closure of the sheltered employment company Remploy (which provides employment for thousands of disabled people) this week, he said we can't have people with disabilities sitting, drinking coffee all day. A shameful remark which demonstrates his lack of understanding.

As services are being cut, and community care and crises loans too, where are people going to turn to for support? We need to support those facing such hard times ahead and I count myself among them.

This is not something to be debated - it's happening all around us, quietly, remorsefully impacting on so many. What can I do? What can we do comrades?

**TOMÁS** Borge was Nicaragua's Minister of the Interior during the first Sandinista government, following the overthrow of the 43-year Somoza family dictatorship.

That put him in charge of internal state security during the US-sponsored Contra War. He was also the last surviving founder member of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) which presently governs Nicaragua.

Along with Carlos Fonseca and Silvio Mayorga, Borge founded the FSLN in 1961. The party took its name from Agustino Cesar Sandino, the radical nationalist hero who led a guerrilla war against the US Marine Corp which had sporadically occupied Nicaragua for a good part of the early 20th century.

Sandino was assassinated by Anastasio Somoza Garcia in 1936. But it was the example of Fidel Castro in 1959 and the Cuban revolutionaries which most inspired the early Sandinistas.

At that time, Latin America was awash with military dictators, and the Cuban example of armed insurrection became a guiding light for many on the continent.

Like other early members of the FSLN, Borge had joined the Socialist Party of Nicaragua (PSN). At that time aligned with ideas of the Soviet Union, the PSN was able to provide its members with class-based analysis and political education.

But it was Cuba that impressed most, by taking direct political action into armed struggle when it came to overthrowing dictators.

By 1956, the assassin of Sandino had been replaced by another Somoza. The poet Rigoberto López Pérez shot this one dead in the city of León.

Seen as a heroic but individual action, this re-

sulted in the poet being gunned down on the spot, and yet one more Somoza taking over as president.

The repression that followed saw Borge arrested and imprisoned, in the belief that he had prior-knowledge of the assassination.

He eventually escaped and lived in different Central American countries, and visited Cuba. He returned to the struggle against Somoza but by the 1970s he was back in prison.

Following the death in combat of Carlos Fonseca, the undisputed leader of the Sandinistas, the movement split into three tendencies.

There were ideological differences, but competing personalities and regional influences can't be ruled out either. Borge headed up the group known as the Prolonged Popular War.

A spectacular Sandinista raid on party goers at the National Palace in August 1978 captured a number of high society hostages.

To secure their freedom, the Somoza government agreed to release Borge and a number of other Sandinista prisoners.

Some time after the Sandinistas ousted the dictator, Borge returned to the prison where he had been held captive. This time he was a visitor coming to see one of his torturers.

"What are you going to do to me?" asked the former guard. "I'm going to forgive you," was Borge's reply.

Much later, he even apologised for the admitted excesses of the Sandinista popular revolution. Not everyone on the Left thanked him for that.

Borge was popular but has also drawn personal and political criticism.

As a politician Borge was labelled with the title of hard line Marxist. He was certainly a man who could get the crowd going with his distinctive style, standing almost sideways to his audience and as a good many Nicaraguans do, gabbing and pointing at the air with two fingers. Some say he imitated Fidel in this respect.

It was during the Contra War of the 1980s, that he gained an international reputation. His eloquent articulation, through speeches, poetry and other writings, made the humanitarian dimensions of the Sandinista Popular Revolution known to a wider world.

At that time, an international movement of solidarity with Nicaragua flourished. Scottish Medical Aid for Nicaragua (SMAN) maintained an office in the capital, Managua and supported a full time worker there.

It was under the auspices of SMAN that the Scottish lawyer and human rights activist turned screenplay writer, Paul Laverty, worked in Nicaragua.

Borge's final job for the present Sandinista government was as ambassador to Peru. A small man of light build, he steps into Latin American history as a giant in the peoples' struggle for a better life.





ANGELA MERKEL: insists that there is no alternative to austerity measures

# Challenge the Euro 'masters'

by Ken Ferguson

**THE** voters of France and Greece had hardly left the polling booths where they soundly rejected the hard line austerity policies of the EU when they were told that they shouldn't have bothered.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrogantly dismissed the millions in favour of the millionaires breathtakingly proclaiming that the EU bosses don't alter their policies after elections. So much for democracy then.

Merkel's statement has at least the merit of honesty and confirms the reality that the EU is increasingly an unelected dictatorship which has already sacked elected governments in Greece and Italy to ram through pro-banker policies.

This dictatorship is, of course, supported by vast armies of experts, academics, journalists and politicians who are effectively bought front people for neo-liberalism.

This was shamefully demonstrated by the outpourings of TV and print journalists who, as they reported the French and Greek results, in their next breath told viewers how they were of course just a pipe dream.

In this script, democratic votes are trumped every time by that

shadowy god 'the markets' and in this scenario they are invincible and only fools think otherwise.

This line has been spun for decades now and is ably assisted by the muddled pro-EU Left who tell us that the nation state is powerless before the chariots of globalism and "resistance is pointless."

Well in Europe, the events in France and Greece may well open a challenge to that mantra but it would be a mistake to think that these are the only points of resistance.

## Latin America

The most striking examples of resistance are to be witnessed in Latin America where country after country has rejected their former status as US puppets and adopted policies using their resources to benefit their own people.

The *Voice* recently reported moves in Argentina to take back control of their oil resources from a Spanish energy giant and, despite howls of big business rage, this move has now been endorsed by Argentine MPs.

This has now been followed by the announcement from Bolivia's President Evo Morales that his MAS (Movement for Socialism) government is to renationalise the country's electricity supply.

Morales made his announcement to cheering May Day

crowds in front of the presidential palace. Bolivian soldiers then peacefully took over the Red Electrica Espanola's (REE) company's offices in Cochabamba, hanging Bolivia's national flag across its entry. A commission to agree compensation for the seized assets with the Spanish firm has been set up.

Morales told cheering crowds outside the palace that the move was "a fair homage to the workers and the Bolivian people who have fought for the recovery of their natural resources and basic services". The MAS government has already taken over Bolivia's gas and telecommunications industries.

Across Latin America, similar processes are under way as the countries so long ruled by pro-Washington dictatorships strike out for what has been called their "second independence."

The lessons for Europe, the UK and particularly Scotland are clear for all to see. The unelected gods of neo-liberalism can be challenged by the forces of democracy and a real independence won from them not just on economic policy but on control of valuable natural resources.

For Scotland, the example is surely vital as we move towards an independence referendum in 2014. While the democratic ques-

tion is key, the related issue of the kind of Scotland that pro-independence campaigners want is surely central to the outcome of the vote.

Writing a century ago, Edinburgh-born James Connolly warned of the danger of thinking that changing the union jack for a green flag over Dublin Castle would end British dominance of Ireland. The same is true of Scotland today.

## Vision

An independence which has at the centre of its economic policy bribing big business with tax cuts and leaving Scotland's natural resources in private hands risk a rapid disillusion with independence as nothing changes. That's why the pro-independence Left needs, while working as part of the broad Yes campaign, to set out an alternative vision of a Scotland which is more than just shifting the post codes of ministers from London to Edinburgh.

Scotland is a highly skilled country, rich in resources, and a vision to harness them for people not profit in a independent republic can play a key role in winning a Yes vote.

A Scotland which is not just politically independent but also base of policies for the collective benefit for the majority is surely a potential winner.

# PEER TO PIER - WALKING IN ORWELL'S FOOTSTEPS

*The Road to Wigan Pier Revisited* by **Stephen Armstrong** (Constable paperback, £11.99)

by *Alex Miller*

IT'S 75 years since George Orwell published one of his most famous books, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. To mark the anniversary, Stephen Armstrong has retraced Orwell's route through northern England.

Orwell's book was in two parts, of roughly equal length. The first half was a vivid and disturbing description of the often dreadful conditions in working class communities trying to survive the effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s, while the more theoretical second half offered an extended account of Orwell's views on socialism and what he took to be the obstacles in the way of making socialism a reality in mid-20th century Britain.

There's no doubt that the first half of Orwell's book is the better of the two. Although his conclusion - that we urgently need "an effective Socialist party...with genuinely revolutionary intentions...[and] numerically strong enough to act" - is spot-on, there is much in the second half that is irrelevant, silly, or simply untrue.

For example, Orwell inveighs against vegetarians, describing them as "food-cranks" who are "out of touch with common humanity". He castigates other elements of the socialist movement as "high-minded women and



IT WERE GRIM: but poverty is still here in 21st century Britain

sandal-wearers and bearded fruit-juice drinkers", and at one point makes the ridiculous assertion that socialism "has produced no songs worth singing".

Overall, the second half of Orwell's book is something of an embarrassment, and Armstrong seems to share this assessment, devoting seven of his book's eight chapters to the powerful descriptive half of Orwell's book, and only the final, somewhat half-hearted chapter to Orwell's less impressive ruminations on what he perceived as the ills of British socialism.

Gathering information on the eve of the riots that broke out across the UK in August 2011, Armstrong visits the cities and streets Orwell traversed in 1936, and in some cases meets the grandchildren of the people Orwell described in his book. It makes for sobering reading.

Orwell's book opens with a memorable description of going down a pit that conveys the claustrophobia and physical extremes endured by coal miners.

With the mines gone, Armstrong signs up with an employment agency for work as a food production operative, and gives a powerful account of the deadening, mind-numbing nature of the work.

And work in 21st century Britain is no guarantee against poverty: "In the mid-1990s, the majority of those in poverty were on benefits. Today, the majority are in work".

Armstrong highlights the plight of those workers employed on "zero hours contracts", the contemporary equivalent of the system in which "casual dockers were herded into a cage each morning to beg for work", and recounts the stories of JobCentre staff allegedly

"given targets of three people a week to refer for sanctions" (i.e. to have their benefits stopped for "not looking for work").

Yet the UK, with its burgeoning numbers of working poor, zero hours contracts and aggressive benefits sanctions, is one in which only 12 private schools account for 10 per cent of Westminster MPs.

Overall, Armstrong paints a vivid picture of how many of the gains of 1945 have already been lost, and what else stands to be lost in the absence of "an effective socialist party with genuinely revolutionary intentions".

There are a couple of errors along the way. At one point, Armstrong confuses Marx's notion of the lumpen proletariat with the notion of the "undeserving poor". At another, he misses the fact that Tam Dalyell retired from the House of Commons in 2005.

• *This review first appeared in the Morning Star*

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**M10 STRIKE  
REKINDLES  
THE FIRES OF  
RESISTANCE**

THE strike of up to half a million public sector workers on 10 May - including PCS, UNITE, UCU and RMT members in the civil service, health, MoD and education - should be the flame to re-ignite the fires of resistance that too many trade union leaders have tried to dampen since the magnificent strike of two million on 30 November.

**United**

These unions plan further co-ordinated action in late June.

The PCS is also taking industrial action in specific departments and sectors, alongside a generalised overtime ban from now until late June. And they have raised the call for a united demo against the cuts this side of the summer.

**Reverse  
the cuts**

IN several councils, the biggest party has changed from one to the other, so the trade union movement and community organisations should join with socialists in pounding these councillors with demands to reverse the cuts of their predecessors - or stand exposed as fakers gaining votes under false pretences.

Now is the time to besiege them with such demands, fresh on the heels of them taking office.

**68 is too late**

OPINION polls confirm massive opposition to the later retirement age being pushed through, which means every female worker under 36 faces an extra eight years in work before she can get a state pension, and every male worker in that age-group an extra three years.

Whilst over one third (36 per cent) of families currently

rely on grandparents for child-minding, and councils jack up the cost of council nursery places as part of the cuts agenda, the government wants to force millions to work longer, denying them a healthy retirement and robbing them of time with their grandchildren.

A child born today will have to work well into their late 70s if Coalition plans are

not derailed by strikes, protests and civil disobedience.

Even Tory voters are rebelling against this abomination of a plan. A recent YouGov poll found 53 per cent of Tory voters against raising the retirement age, with 35 per cent of them criticising the fact it will lead to even fewer job opportunities for young people.

Across the board, 62 per cent of people oppose making workers work longer for less on retirement - despite an incredible 38 per cent of those polled not even being aware of the planned delay in retirement!

This country is poised to have the latest state retirement age in Europe, as well as some of the lowest wages, longest working week and poorest holiday entitlements.

The wealthy and their governments try to drag us out of recession by preaching the gospel "shop till you drop" - whilst slashing workers' spending power!

Now they want us to literally "work till you drop" - to ensure the bosses of big private businesses can continue to wallow in their current average pensions of £175,000 a year.

PHOTO: Craig Maclean



MASS OPPOSITION: every female under 36 faces an extra eight years in work before she can get a state pension

**COALITION CAN BE BEATEN**

THE recent council elections saw hundreds of thousands voting either SNP or Labour as a means of punishing cuts Coalition. They won votes primarily because they are not the Coalition!

The electoral decimation of the chief architects of cuts should be the green light for the trade unions to unite with community groups and

socialists in decisive, early action to drive the crisis-ridden Coalition back further. They can be beaten. They can be driven out of office.

The response on the streets to the SSP's central message 'no cuts, tax the rich' was infinitely larger than the votes cast for our uncompromising socialist

case, partly because people were browbeaten with the media message of a 'two-horse race', partly because Labour and the SNP lied through their teeth with talk of creating jobs, and people often gave one of the 'big two' their first two votes, giving the Scottish Socialist Party third or fourth preference.

# DEMAND MASS PROTEST NOW

ONE of the trade union 'leaders' who did most to stall the momentum after N30 is UNISON's Dave Prentis. Now, in an attempt to save face amongst members increasingly angry at being 'sold a pup' by Prentis, he has called for a mass trade union-led demo in the autumn.

Why wait that long?

Active members of every union should argue for a huge Saturday demo over the next couple of months, demanding that either the STUC call it in Scotland or a 'coalition of the willing trade unions' do so.

Not instead of a broader, bigger strike in June, but in addition to it, as a means of reaching out to workers in local government, education and the private sector who are not part of the M10 strike. Not just on pensions but on other cuts and attacks on rights, jobs and benefits.



DEMONSTRATE! why wait till the autumn for a mass demo?

## STOP THE CUTS

# Capitalism doesn't work

THE battle against cuts, both at local council level and nationally on the pensions issue, is critical in the broader resistance to the systematic dismantling of workers' rights, benefits and frontline services gained by past generations through struggle.

Plans to usher in regional pay; slash the right to challenge unfair dismissal from work; curtail the right to have functioning union shop stewards to stand up for members; and the core aim of rampant privatisation of what remains of public property - all these and more are the inevitable product of a capitalist system that is based on exploitation for profit, that simply doesn't work.

## Strike back

It seeks to slaughter working class conditions in defence of profit margins and privileges for the obscenely rich minority. Capitalism means cuts, mass unemployment and mounting poverty from the cradle to the grave.

Socialism - based on taxation of the rich, wealth redistribution and democratic public ownership - is the only means of escaping 'eternal austerity'.

Those who strike back in May have an important part to play in building a future worthy of the name - a socialist future based on people, not profit.

# Scottish Socialist Party



## Join the SSP here

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Or telephone: 0781 126 5388

Or see our website: [www.scottishsocialistparty.org](http://www.scottishsocialistparty.org)

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# COALITION IN CRISIS



**VULNERABLE AND DIVIDED: Clegg and Cameron - "Two posh boys who don't know the price of milk" says one Tory MP**

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

**AFTER** the council elections, working class people continue to face appalling cuts to their living standards; they are left with no option but to 'struggle or starve'.

The chief architects of the cuts to pensions, wages, benefits and community facilities were hammered in the council elections. The Tories lost over 400 councillors, in a tidal wave of revulsion at their cuts and their sleaze.

Their junior partners fared even worse at the hands of voters, many of whom feel cheated and betrayed by the Lib Dems. The

carnage included the loss of 80 out of 151 LibDem councillors in Scotland.

Despite the SSP vote suffering from the crushing squeeze between the two tribes of Labour and SNP going to war, enhanced by the brutal, self-fulfilling media lie that this was a two-horse race, we beat the LibDem party of

government in many of the seats we contested. Mind you, so did an Edinburgh 'penguin'!

## No mandate

The millionaires' Coalition has even less of a mandate for their butchery than they had before May 3rd. That applies particularly in Scotland, where they have

plummeted to the status of fringe parties, mostly isolated to a few rural pockets in the Borders and South Ayrshire in the case of the Tories.

They are in deep disarray, drowning in a sea of sleaze around the Murdoch scandal and the descent of the economy into a 'double-dip' recession for the first time since

1975 - and the longest economic depression in decades.

With that background, Cameron, Clegg and co are all the more ruthless in their desire to make working class people pay for the crisis, whilst those who perpetrated some of the worst cuts are wallowing in wealth.

But they are weak, vulnerable and divided, with right-wing Tories decrying the presence of the LibDems, and even a Tory MP publicly sneering at Cameron and Clegg as "two posh boys who don't know the price of milk" - an assessment that finds massive resonance.

• *Continued on*  
*pages 10&11*

## Slasher Hutton's £100,000-a-day

**MILLIONS** of public sector workers have had their first taste of increased chunks of their wages being deducted as pension contributions last month - with a lot worse to come next year and the year after unless the government is defeated by united action.

Meantime, Labour Lord John Hutton - 'Slasher' Hutton to those suffering the assault on



**LORD**  
**'slasher'**  
**hutton**

six million public sector workers' pensions that he designed under the previous Labour government - has landed a £100,000 a day job as chair of the part-privatised civil service outfit, MyCSP.