

The Dundee Timex strike - 20 years on:
mostly female workforce's heroic fight
electrified workers across the globe
• see pages 6&7

Sam Lee: singer
challenges folk
preconceptions
• see page 8

£1 • issue 410 • 25th January - 7th February 2013
www.scottishsocialistvoice.net

Scottish Socialist Voice



IAN DAVIDSON



JOHANN LAMONT



ANAS SARWAR

A PARCEL O' ROGUES

**Scots Labour politicians brand
Holyrood 'undemocratic', oppose
Bannockburn commemoration,
but support Tories' cuts and £50m
marking of WW1 slaughter...**

by Alan Bissett

IF there is a single figure
who could symbolise
Scotland it is Robert Burns.
Regarded around the world
as one of the greatest poets
who ever lived, he is to

Scotland what Shakespeare
is to England and Dylan is to
America: a bard whose
complexity, linguistic genius
and poetic sensitivity can
articulate the soul of an entire
nation.

• Continued on page 9



facebook.com/ScottishSocialistVoice



[@ssv_voice](https://twitter.com/ssv_voice)

Challenges facing SSP and Yes camp in 2013

by Colin Fox

THE 600 people who crammed into the Yes Glasgow launch meeting last week took the final tally attending these inaugural events to around 4000 - that's 4000 activists eager to play their part in maximising the Yes vote in their area in the 2014 Independence Referendum.

And whilst everyone will acknowledge the many important challenges that lie ahead in taking the case into every town and village in the country, it can fairly be said that this is a genuinely inclusive mass movement with a place for everyone interested in seeing the people of Scotland determine our own future.

It goes without saying that it would be silly to pursue the independence case outside Yes Scotland rather than seek to influence it from within.

I have likened the burgeoning independence coalition to the anti-Poll Tax campaign I played a part in leading during the late 1980s - a movement whose notable victory brought down the hated Thatcher government.

Like the anti-Poll Tax campaign, the independence movement today has a strong sense of injustice running through it and an iron determination to succeed. It is another genuine and progressive mass movement.

Our shared case is not just that Scots deserve the right to make our own decisions and determine our future but increasingly that, given the chance, we want to build a country that is fairer, more socially progressive and less indentured to big busi-



PHOTO: Craig Maclean

YES TODAY, KNOW TOMORROW: for a fairer Scotland

ness and the anarchy of their 'free market'.

But it is true Yes Scotland needs to spell out what independence means for the people of Scotland much more in the year ahead. Such detail is urgently required if we are to shift public opinion in our direction.

It was in recognition of this point, I believe, that SNP First Minister Alex Salmond, raised the prospect of a written Constitution for an Independent Scotland which would include guaranteed rights on housing and education.

The polls have stubbornly suggested we are in the minority and, whilst this gives us all an incentive to work harder, we also need a qualitative change in this debate. The polls reflect public opinion, they do not shape it. That is our job. And to my mind there is no more important question facing the Yes Scotland

movement than to explain 'What independence is for?'

For the SSP, the answer is full employment in the face of under and unemployment, eradicating fuel poverty as one third of households struggle to keep warm and improving the living standards of the many amid the worst recession in 80 years.

In other words, independence has to focus on the issues that are important to working class people in Scotland today. That way our case takes on a relevance working class Scots can identify with and one they can see their stake in.

And for the SSP itself, the challenge is to raise our clear socialist ideas inside this huge independence movement with tact and skill. Discussing with other activists and highlighting our record in promoting an independent socialist Scotland over many years will reap important rewards.

Many in this movement believe it is only by persuading our fellow Scots of the material advantages they can expect from independence that we can win the vote in 2014.

Not everyone in favour of independence is a socialist of course. But it is also true there are hundreds of pro-independence activists out there who are prepared to embrace our socialist ideas and we should seek them out and work closely with them everywhere we can.

How does the SSP get its message across to independence supporters effectively? By being part of the movement, working side by side with others and by demonstrating our commitment and dedication.

At the same time we will maintain our dialogue with those who have yet to make up their mind about independence. Our series of public meetings on the theme 'Why you will be better off with Independence' have been very successful.

We have taken our case around the country and broken new ground. On our platform in Edinburgh this week for example, we welcomed Adil Bhatti (of Asians for Independence) and John Finnie MSP, two prominent former SNP members, who left the nationalists after their conference overturned its principled opposition to NATO. Our key objective remains then to build the SSP and to advance the independent socialist cause during this exciting political period.

• Colin Fox represents the SSP on the Yes Scotland Advisory Board

Trade Unionists for Independence

by *Richie Venton, TUFi Steering Group*

A POTENTIALLY very important arm of the campaign for Scottish independence is under construction and growing: Trade Unionists for Independence (TUFi).

Initiated by a small group of trade unionists in Edinburgh a few months ago, TUFi has recently held two large, vibrant West of Scotland meetings, with further plans for meetings in Dundee and Aberdeen.

The West of Scotland meetings attracted union reps, conveners, national committee members, full-time officials and other active members from a wide range of unions, including EIS, UNISON, PCS, UNITE, FBU, NUJ, USDAW, CWU and the STUC Youth Committee.

It debated and adopted a Statement of Aims [see extracts in box] which gives a clear purpose and perspective to the campaign, promoting pro-trade union arguments for a Yes vote, linking immediate issues that workers are concerned about to the opportunity to transform their lives by offloading the burden of undemocratic Westminster rule and ruin.

Convincing workers

Unlike the 'business wing' of the pro-independence movement, which is minuscule in any case, TUFi unashamedly seeks to stand up for the working-class majority, with aims rooted in numerous trade union conference policies.

And it is based on the central notion that the trade union movement needs to shape the agenda here and now on the type of Scotland we want after 2014, both in order to win workers to a Yes vote and to win radical and permanent change in favour of workers, their families



CLEAR PURPOSE: the trade union movement needs to shape the agenda here and now on the type of Scotland we want after 2014

and communities after winning a vote for independence.

The aims agreed mean we can campaign inside each trade union, STUC conference and at workplace level to convince

different sections of workers that an independent Scotland could be the first step on the road to sweeping changes to their material well-being.

Right now hundreds of thou-

sands of workers are either unsure or against independence. They will not be convinced by merely repeating the mantra 'vote Yes'.

The concrete aims of TUFi are powerful weapons to persuade, for instance, low paid workers of the opportunity to win a decent living wage through independence; public sector workers on reversal of privatisation and cuts; active union members on a vast enhancement of trade union and workplace rights (an issue hardly even mentioned in the referendum debate so far).

As the TUFi Statement of Aims rightly concludes:

"TUFi appeals to workers and trade unions to join us in campaigning for a Yes vote in order to build a socially and economically just Scotland, where the interests of the working class millions displace the greed of the multinationals and millionaires."

TUFi Statement of Aims (extracts)

TUFi is open to progressive trade unionists from all political parties and those affiliated to none, with the purpose of not just exchanging one set of flags and emblems for another, but of winning Scottish independence as a means of achieving a fundamental and irreversible redistribution of power and wealth in favour of working people, their families and communities.

TUFi is an integral part of the broader Yes campaign, but with its own distinctive purpose, based on the best principles of trade unionism, including social justice, equality, wealth redistribution and internationalism.

TUFi is fighting for a Yes vote so the Scottish working-class majority population then has the opportunity to elect a

government with the powers and political will to transform their lives, through immediate measures such as:

- Abolition of all anti-union laws, and their replacement with a charter of workers' rights that sets the very highest standards in the whole of Europe.
- A decent level of national minimum living wage for all workers, trainees and apprentices from 16 onwards, with equal pay for women and abolition of age discrimination.
- Reversal of the assault on benefits and the demonisation of the sick, disabled and unemployed, with a living income guaranteed to all those unable to work.
- Reversal of all privatisation, public sector cuts and attacks on pensions, with a living income state pension and voluntary retirement for all at 60.

- Jobs for all - investment in clean, green energy, housing, integrated public transport.
- Democratic public ownership of energy, construction and banking in order to eradicate fuel poverty, pollution, substandard housing and unemployment.
- Removal of all nuclear weapons, with guaranteed jobs and protection of conditions for all defence industry workers through diversification into peaceful, socially useful employment.

TUFi recognises the powers that go with independence can create the opportunity for radical and permanent change in the interests of working people, but also the need for trade unionists to set the agenda now for the type of Scotland we aim to achieve after a Yes vote in 2014.

Union Jack Labour MPs trash Holyrood as 'undemocratic'

by Ken Ferguson

IN what is undoubtedly a taster of the rabid ravings we can expect from the anti-independence camp, Scottish Labour MPs have labelled the Scottish Parliament undemocratic and claimed that celebrations of the 1314 Bannockburn battle aim to glorify the "murder" of English soldiers.

The Bannockburn attack was launched by the deeply sectarian Glasgow Labour MP Ian Davidson while his colleague Anas Sarwar branded Holyrood "not a democratic place" and the Scottish government "a dictatorship of one man".

It is deeply ironic that Sarwar was speaking in the chamber of the so called "mother of parliaments", the democratically dubious House of Commons.

Slaughter

As far as Davidson's Bannockburn jibe is concerned, he makes no mention that the UK government - no doubt ably assisted by the "loyal" opposition Labour Party - is about to spend £50million to mark the 100th anniversary of the industrial slaughter of World War One.

Indeed, we can surely expect an all-out drive to harness the 1914 anniversary - suitably whitewashed - to the noble cause of keeping the Union Jack flying high over the No camp and the Scots firmly under Westminster rule, supposedly 'better together'.

We can expect much of the valour of the Scots in service of the greater (British) good to be milked mercilessly by the supporters of the union and showcased as another reason for sticking with the bloodstained British state.

This will include acting as a host for Britannia's weapons of nuclear terrorism on the Clyde.

Expect little mention of the fact that the casualty rates for World War 1 starkly highlight the fact that the Scottish regiments were and still are regarded as shock troops by the British military.

During the 1914-18 bloodbath, 557,000 Scots enlisted in the services - 150,000 died, which is 26.4 per cent as against an overall UK rate of 11.8 per cent with 22 of the British Army's 157 battalions raised in Scotland.

The devastation of loss was powerfully portrayed in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* and on countless war memorials in rural and urban Scotland.

However, the military glory card is just one more of the pack played by Better Together's fear mongers.

2012 closed amidst an entirely synthetic "row" about whether or not Scotland would be allowed in the EU after a Yes vote, doctored reports ignoring senior Royal Navy evidence to the contrary that independence would close the Clyde shipyards and an increasingly bizarre attempt - led by the BBC - to portray Scottish

Government waiting time policies as "in crisis".

As always, it is useful to take a look behind such campaigns, and in the health case it seems likely that its aim is to undermine former health minister Nicola



IAN DAVIDSON: attack

Sturgeon who is now responsible for the Scottish Government's Yes work, which is certainly the current drive of Scottish Labour.

The truth is that behind their smug smiles, the No camp face months of bad news from benefit cuts, sackings and growing economic hardship.

Particularly worried are the stunned Czars of New Labour

who lost power to the SNP in Holyrood, are increasingly in trouble in local councils and face a major SNP challenge in the latest polling for Westminster.

These concerns have been sharpened by the emergence of an increasingly vocal Labour for Independence group, with the same Anwar Sarwar trying to rub-bish them. Alongside this, the formation of another pro-Yes group, Trade Unionists for Independence, will further dismay Labour's under-pressure Scottish chiefs.

The truth is that as Labour continues to support most of the ConDem cuts and its councillors implement them, and Scottish Labour leader Johann Lamont steps up her war on benefits, the case for voting either No or Labour is eroding fast.

That is why the task of the pro-independence left is to drive home the message that a Yes vote is essential to open the way for a set of policies aimed at delivering economic and social justice, breaking with Britain's wars to a Scotland putting people before profit.

It can be won, and only action and hard campaigning can achieve it.

Scottish Socialist Voice subscriptions

To subscribe, fill in this form and send it to: Scottish Socialist Voice, Suite 370, 4th Floor, Central Chambers, 93 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 6LD.
Or telephone: 0781 126 5388
Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to 'Scottish Socialist Voice'
Visit our website: www.scottishsocialistvoice.net

Name.....

Address.....

Phone.....

Email.....

I enclose: ☐ £5 for 5 issues ☐ £10 for 10 issues ☐ £20 for 20 issues

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

FAR FROM GAME OVER FOR 2014

by Campbell Martin

THOSE of us who support an independent Scotland should admit defeat and slink off into the political undergrowth to lick our wounds.

That was the underlying message of stories in pro-British Union newspapers, carrying screaming headlines of a poll lead for the 'No to Independence' campaign.

We were told this represented a disaster for the independence movement, which would, the Unionists argued, struggle to recover.

This was nothing more than wishful thinking on the part of the British political parties and their friends in the loyal Unionist media.

Far from being a hammer-blow to the pro-independence camp, news of a poll lead for the No campaign is simply notification that it's time to redouble our efforts in getting across the positive message of how an independent Scotland can deliver a better life for all our citizens.

Devastating cuts

Without the powers that only come with independence, the future for Scotland is 'more of the same' - more devastating cuts to jobs, services and benefits delivered by multi-millionaire, posh-boy Tories that Scots have already rejected at the ballot box.

There is over a year until we vote in the Independence Referendum, yet the British Unionists are so arrogant they think they have victory in the bag.

Let them think it, while in the pro-independence movement go about the business of building support and securing the majority we



POSITIVE MESSAGE: a No vote would be a vote of no confidence in ourselves

need to deliver for Scotland the status of a normal nation.

The Yes campaign is creating branches in towns across Scotland.

Activists are talking to family members, friends, work colleagues, people in the pub. The message is getting across.

All the strands of the campaign - street stalls, public meetings, press activity, personal contact - are building support and, crucially, converting people to the cause who previously had believed the Unionist mantra that Scotland is too wee to be a real country, and Scots too stupid and too poor to govern ourselves.

The No campaign is built on negativity, on attacking the confidence and abilities of ordinary Scots. In politics, this relentless negativity has

been shown in the way Labour, Tory and Lib Dem politicians have united in attempting to brand as a liar Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond.

In addition, the deputy leader of the so-called 'Scottish' Labour Party recently claimed Scotland's parliament was "an undemocratic place". For British Unionists to succeed, they must undermine the confidence of Scots.

Fostering doubt

Salmond didn't lie - the charge was levelled in relation to legal advice regarding membership of the European Union, for which the First Minister has since been cleared - and the Scottish Parliament is a much more democratic place than the corrupt House of

Commons in London. But the British Unionist campaign is reliant on disparaging anything Scottish to create a feeling of uncertainty and foster doubt in the minds of Scots. Again, the Unionists only succeed if they can undermine the confidence of Scots.

In the Independence Referendum, if we vote No, if we reject the opportunity to run our own independent country, we would actually be passing a motion of no confidence in ourselves.

Meanwhile, regarding that current poll lead for the No campaign: have a look at the SNP's poll ratings a year out from their landslide election victory of 2011, or check 1977 predictions of how well the Scotland football team were going to do in the following year's World Cup finals.

by *Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace organiser*

TWENTY years ago, on 29 January 1993, workers in the multinational Timex Dundee factory launched a seven-month battle that electrified workers across the UK and far beyond. A mostly female workforce of 343, they fought with heroic courage to stop the decimation of jobs, wages, holidays, pension rights and other conditions, but were confronted by mass police intimidation and press smears.

At a localised level, this titanic battle between workers and a ruthless capitalist employer, backed to the hilt by a press lie-machine and a virtual police occupation of parts of their own city, had many of the hallmarks of the great miners' strike of 1984-5.

This showdown occurred under a Tory Westminster government that had constructed a mountain of anti-union laws to block workers' resistance to being exploited. But the workers and their shop stewards drove a coach and horses through the Tory laws designed to help multinationals and millionaires profit from generations of workers and then toss them aside like squeezed lemons.

They ignored the limit of six to a picket day and daily. They fought on despite elected shop stewards being banned from the picket line, with court interdicts and threats of being jailed. They confronted a diluted version of apartheid South Africa's pass laws, which banned pickets from areas of their native city - which were saturated by police.

Solidarity

Eight years after the defeat of the miners, the defiant stance of Timex workers was an inspiration to hundreds of thousands of workers across the UK, who for years had faced managerial dictatorship. They held workplace collections and travelled hundreds of miles to join them on the mass pickets and demos.

If the national union leaderships and STUC had shown half the determination and courage of those who mounted daily 24-hour pickets in all weather; regular mass pickets; protest demos and solidarity strike

TIMEX 1993

actions with the Timex workers, they could have won a clear, history-changing victory.

Timex brought in a ruthless Sussex spiv, Peter Hall, as £100,000-a-year director of operations in Britain. He started to strip Dundee of jobs and working conditions. On 5 January the workers each got a letter, a third of them 'thick', meaning they were sacked, two thirds 'thin', not laid off.

The workers responded to this vicious attempt to divide and conquer by occupying the canteen. The slippery Hall promised negotiations with their union, the AEEU.

Meantime they voted by 92 per cent to strike, which they did on 29 January when it was plain the promised talks and attempts to bring in ACAS weren't going to happen.

Round-the-clock pickets were mounted, rotas arranged, food and shelter organised on the Harrison Road gates. Mass meetings agreed to march back to work on 17 February, united, demanding reinstatement of all. The Timex bosses locked them out, demanding lay-offs, a 10 per cent pay cut, loss of holidays, increased hours, cuts to pension rights and other humiliations as the price for opening the gates.

The workers refused to be cowed, and were locked out for the next six months, until Timex eventually gave up their attempt to run the factory

with unskilled, untrained, underpaid scab labour and closed down its Dundee plant on 29 August 1993.

One of the key means of building wider support for the locked-out workers was mass pickets. On some occasions 1,000 thronged outside the main gates.

Two schools of thought competed. Some top union officials, who had done nothing to call or build these expressions of workers' solidarity, wanted just a passive gathering.

Scabs

Others, including the Strike Committee and pickets themselves, agreed with those of us who advocated mass human walls of solidarity outside the factory entrance to block buses ferrying in scabs, halting production, even if only for a few hours or a day. And on some occasions, Hall gave the scabs a day off when a mass picket had been announced - a tremendous boost to morale at the time.

Mass police operations were mounted to block effective picketing, with police violence, undercover cops and snatch squads. Some of their actions were beyond workers' belief, a harsh eye-opener to the role of the state. They crushed pickets up against fences whilst they escorted scabs into work. They broke a woman's arm during arrest,

held her for 27 hours before release - without charge! Despite the peaceful nature of the pickets themselves, Tory Prime Minister John Major denounced "picket line violence". The media played along with headlines like "mob fury".

Police chiefs and editors collaborated with Timex bosses to demonise the pickets and their supporters, in a vain attempt to isolate them from the mass of workers.

But the most scandalous aspect of this was the way right-wing AEEU and STUC officials and Labour politicians aped the Tory talk of 'picket line violence'.

Needless to say most of them had never attended a picket. But when the Timex workers' resilience and mass pressure from below by active trade unionists obliged the STUC's general secretary Campbell Christie to lead a special STUC General Council trip to the picket on 19 May, he rightly stated: "There will be no peace and tranquility at the Timex factory until all sacked workers are reinstated."

But he went on to tell TV cameras: "We will be asking people to come to Dundee...but we don't want anyone to come to break the law or create violence." I wrote at the time:

"Who did Campbell have in mind? Was it over 500 'outsiders', bussed into Dundee at public expense, fed and paid overtime from



SHOWDOWN:
Timex workers fought to stop the decimation of jobs, wages, holidays, pension rights and other conditions, but were confronted by mass police intimidation and press smears

the public purse, who fought desperately to clear the road for Peter Hall's hired scabs...and who dress in distinctive blue uniforms?"

AEEU leaders Gavin Laird and Jimmy Airlie went far further in their treacherous treatment of 343 members who had inspired workers across the land. They wrote to Timex workers threatening them with expulsion from the union. They threatened to withdraw the modest £30 a week strike pay. They tried to ban a prominent strike leader from speaking on socialist public platforms.

Instead of undermining the fight, they should have thrown the weight of the union behind the boycott of Timex products that had been gathering pace across the UK, by organising workplace meetings at firms that supplied them parts or were their chief customers, such as Creda, IBM and Electrolux. Alongside mass pickets to blockade production at the scab factory, and union-organised boycotts of Timex supplies and products, the other chief strand of struggle required was unified solidarity strike action.

The call for a 24 hour general strike, initially in Dundee, later Scotland-wide, was repeatedly discussed on the picket lines and Strike Committee. Those of us advocating this did so in the context of mounting opposition to the Tories from numerous sections of public sector workers, and

posties taking unofficial strike action - and winning!

In mid-April, the STUC called a demo. Big contingents of Dundee workplaces walked out to join the 6,000-strong march, in the likes of NCR, Valentine's, Bulkbag, Holochrome, Ninewells hospital laundry and Dundee district council. In some firms, management gave time off work as they faced a 2 or 3-hour strike anyway.

If union national leaders had built on this, solidarity strike action even in Dundee itself would have divided employers, as they lost production due to the stubborn refusal of Timex to reinstate their workers. Workers united in action could have divided and defeated the employers.

Strike calls

Instead, Campbell Christie declared, "There will be no secondary action and we will not be calling for secondary action", with the BBC reporting, "He rejected the call for a 24 hour general strike despite repeated calls for it". Christie explained:

"Tory anti-union laws are unfair and the STUC want them changed, but the Timex campaign has to operate within the legal constraints introduced by the government."

The real fact of life was that Timex workers had defied these vicious laws for the previous 90 days, and in-

spired such vast working class solidarity that the bosses dare not use Tory laws to remove all but six pickets, for instance.

After the 90 day sacking notices expired on 17 May, Timex bosses hoped to pick and choose who to reinstate. But the workers made it plain it was 'one back, all back', demanding removal of the scabs and reinstatement of all 343 under their old contracts with continuity of service.

The Strike Committee called more mass pickets and a rally, appealing to workers across Scotland, who responded in their thousands. Instead of escalating the action, the AEEU leadership of Laird and Airlie had secret phone calls to Timex, who came up with a new "offer". This was, as one woman picket described it, "diabolical crap"!

They offered a 27 per cent pay cut, loss of shift premiums and Xmas bonus, and skill tests for workers' own jobs so as to weed out those they wanted rid of. Despite Airlie recommending this, a mass meeting threw it out by 341-to-2, and women literally chased him down the street to the train station in fury!

Timex next tried to cow the workers and clear the gates of pickets with a threat of closure by Xmas, with vague talk of enhanced redundancy payments and taking back 100-150 workers on reduced wages.

The time had arrived for a new tactic to stop asset stripping of machinery and to force reinstatement, either by bludgeoning Timex bosses into submission, or a Tory government alarmed at rising turmoil into intervening: a factory occupation.

This was discussed that with the Strike Committee, who were open to the idea, but all the obstacles thrown up by mass policing and the cowardly role of national union leaders meant it didn't happen.

Nevertheless, the plan Timex bosses had of bringing back some of the skilled workers to bolster production, with predictions of at least £25million sales in the remainder of 1993, or to sell it off for a good price - collapsed in the face of incredible tenacity by the workers.

They were forced to pull out of Dundee in late August. That was a tragically sad day for a city whose workers had piled up Timex profits for generations, with whole families working there.

Heroic fighters

But for most of the heroic fighters who had inspired a generation, it was the lesser of two evils; a better outcome than to let a ruthless multinational cast aside its skilled, organised workforce for a slave camp geared to churning out profit on the backs of super-exploited workers.

This chapter in Scottish workers' history is rich in lessons - too numerous to cover in one article.

But above all, it proved the willingness of working people - working women in particular - to stand up and fight for their rights if they are given even half a lead. And the need to construct a fighting leadership in their unions, in contrast to those over-paid union officials who quake in their well-heeled boots at the thought of defying vicious anti-union laws designed to enslave workers for profit.

We should never forget the women and men of Timex who showed such courage, tenacity and ingenuity - in a titanic battle that could have been won with a different type of leadership at the head of the unions. A new young generation of workers should be inspired to follow their example - and learn from it.

SAM LEE CAN HOLD HIS OWN GROUND

Sam Lee and Friends performed as part of Celtic Connections at St Andrew's in the Square, Glasgow, on January 18

by Sandra Webster

ON a cold wintry night, where much of the south east of England had come to a halt, Sam Lee and his band were one of the first artists to perform at Celtic Connections in Glasgow.

Lee performs songs from Romany and traveller communities from all over Scotland but admitted he had a special place in his heart for those who had taught him ballads from Aberdeenshire, Blairgowrie and Perthshire.

Rather than learn songs from the archives, he goes straight to the people who sing the songs and learns from them.

Apprentice

He describes himself as the apprentice of Stanley Lee, a traveller from Aberdeenshire who died in 2009.

Stanley passed on to him a ring, an ingot and a pebble, which Sam keeps with him, and in a ceremony made him the keeper of songs. Like many other folk singers following on from the likes of Martin Carthy, he passes on songs - some of which have been sung for close to a millennium - to the next generation.

Lee was accompanied by a band where, along with more traditional instruments such as the fiddle, a Japanese koto and Romany drone instruments were used. They are just back from a festival in Bangladesh where, they explained, traditional instruments were used to perform songs which seem to flow easily into other cultures traditions.

The audience were treated to a



WHAT THE FOLK? Sam Lee challenges preconceptions of what 'traditional folk' should sound like

set which included many traditional songs such as *Black Dog* which Lee learned from Freda Black. The set included of course many of Stan Lee's songs from the North East of Scotland and included *Over Yonder Hill* and the hauntingly beautiful *Moorclough Maggie*.

He finished with two songs from his Mercury nominated CD *Ground Of It's Own*, the bawdy *Ballad of George Collins* and the sweet *Goodbye My Darling*.

Although his songs are now performed to young audiences, his voice seems to float across the centuries, sharing songs that should be remembered as part of a rich heritage.

His rhythm is that of the ballad singer performing his songs across the camp-fire. You get the impression this is how

the songs were taught to Lee and it is his job not only to preserve them but give them new meaning to a new audience.

Although a curator of songs, he never appeared to be giving a lesson as he shared the stories behind the songs and glimpses of the people and their lives who trusted Lee with their musical treasure.

His voice is beautiful and it carried well in the acoustics of St Andrew's in the Square.

A crowd of old and not so old folkies enjoyed a fantastic musical evening where the songs were just as part of the performance as the singer of them. Lee said he has been to Celtic Connections as fan for the last seven years and only performed there last and this year.

I do not doubt he will be back with more amazing songs that he's learned, not in an archive, but in the home of the singers who hand them on to him to keep them alive for us.

• See: samleesong.co.uk

The Wee Red Bookshop

Books, T-shirts, ideas to change the world! All at very reasonable prices. 137 London Road, Glasgow. Phone for opening info, or if you can donate books, we can arrange for them to be picked up.

0781 126 5388

The socialist Burns

by Alan Bissett

IF there is a single figure who could symbolise Scotland it is Robert Burns. Regarded around the world as one of the greatest poets who ever lived, he is to Scotland what Shakespeare is to England and Dylan is to America: a bard whose complexity, linguistic genius and poetic sensitivity can articulate the soul of an entire nation.

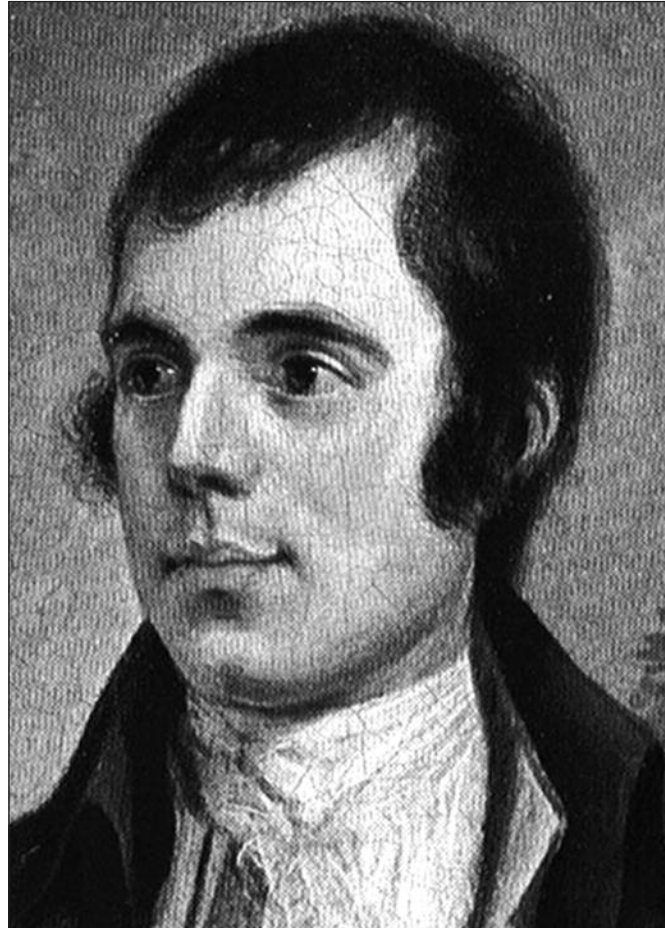
The annual Burns celebrations in January are a mixed blessing. It is right that we commemorate our most important literary figure. Burns Night is usually where schoolchildren will initially encounter their own language, Scots, written down (albeit in an archaic form).

This is often the first step towards a discovery of their cultural heritage. The pageantry of Burns Night, however - the Address to the Haggis, the Immortal Memory, the Toast to the Lassies, the Reply - while often enormous fun, have served somewhat to turn Burns into the kitsch, couthy, tartan-clad 'Rabbie'.

Romantic myths

Ask people what springs to mind when they think of Robert Burns and they'll mention his drinking, his womanising, the misty-eyed *Auld Lang Syne* and the rip-roaring *Tam O' Shanter*. A romantic mythology has grown up around Burns which keeps him safe enough to sell to the tourists and be celebrated even by Tories.

There is, though, a side to him which has been kept quieter: that of Burns the radical. The self-taught son of a ploughman, in touch with



SUPPERMAN: the radical Robert Burns empathised with the poor

the reality of hard labour, Burns displayed an extraordinary political insight, far ahead of his time.

For example, as we in present-day Scotland debate constitutional matters, as we attempt to dismantle an imperialist legacy, and watch Europe collapse under the groaning weight of a failed capitalism, we should bear in mind Burns' still-relevant words from 1792:

*While Europe's eye is fix'd on mighty things,
The fate of Empires and the fall of Kings;
While quacks of State must each produce his plan,
And even children lisp the Rights of Man;*

*Amid this mighty fuss just let me mention,
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.*

So while it's true he was something of a ladies' man, Burns was also a proto-feminist! He was a democrat, a supporter of the French Revolution and a believer in the sovereign rights of all people.

One of his most famous works, *A Man's A Man For A' That*, sung by Sheena Wellington at the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, excoriates a society that "gies fools their silks, and knaves their wine" while ignoring poverty. Burns, as ever, empathises with the poor

and the working man, those who dine on 'hamely fare'. The poem could even stand as an anthem for international socialism, laughing at the pretensions and arrogance of the lords 'wha strut and stare, and a' that' and ending:

*For a' that, and a'that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That man to man,
the world o'er
Shall brothers be for a' that!*

Of course, we still live in times of poverty. The modern-day Scotland has many problems left to solve, and we socialists - along with Greens and nationalists - are presently engaging in a historic, democratic revolution of which Burns would no doubt approve.

Scathing words

It is not difficult to imagine Burns, were he alive today, lending his poetry, his celebrity and his voice to the movement for Scottish independence. Some of his most scathing words were reserved for the Act of Union in 1707, which Burns recognised - like the Scots of the day who rioted in protest - as a simple extension of English imperialism.

Aghast that a nation which had, for centuries, staunchly defended her sovereignty against England's might and ambition could suddenly capitulate, and angry at Scots nobles protecting their own interests, Burns wrote: *We're bought and sold for English gold,
Such a parcel o' rogues in a nation'.*

This Burns Night, the likes of Alasdair Darling, Willie Rennie and Johann Lamont might do well to remember these lines.

SCOTTISH SOCIALIST PARTY COUNCILLOR JIM BOLLAN ASKS... There's only one Scottish Tory MP - why is Scotland facing massive Tory cuts?

“AS we all look forward to 2013 there is no doubt the Tory Government are raising the stakes in the class war with the introduction of the bedroom tax, the universal credit, cuts to public funding, attacks on the benefits of the sick, the poor, and the low paid.

Contrast these attacks on the working class with how the ruling class have been treated. The rich and powerful continue to avoid paying their taxes. Their bloated private incomes continue to grow both here and in the tax havens they hoard their money in abroad.

Big business continues to make massive profits while avoiding corporation and income tax payments. Fuel poverty continues to rise while the big six energy companies continue to make massive profits.

The banks remain free to do as they want with little or no new regulations in place after the part they played in the latest crisis in capitalism in 2008.

The class division in our country is palpable with billionaires a plenty who have power and influence over Government,

while another food bank is being set up in West Dunbartonshire to feed the families who are disenfranchised, excluded and live in poverty as a direct result of the unfair distribution of wealth and power which capitalism creates. Food banks in Scotland have doubled in number in the last six months.

The hated Tory bedroom tax will come into force in April without any opposition from the Labour Council in West Dunbartonshire. Three thousand tenants will have their housing benefit cut by between 14 and 25 per cent which is a savage attack on people already living on the breadline whether they be on

low state benefits or low wages.

Homelessness will increase as these draconian cuts force the poor into rent arrears and with an uncaring Labour Council, I fear the worst for many families already living in poverty.

These attacks by the ruling class are not accidental - they are planned and required to ensure the capitalist system continues to flourish to serve the rich and powerful at the expense of the working class.

Inequality, division and poverty could be tackled under a socialist system, which would mean the demise of the current corrupt privileged system that we live under.

The introduction of the Universal Credit (UC) is a further direct attack on the most vulnerable in our community, with the Labour Council in West Dunbartonshire actively assisting the Tories by taking part in a pilot scheme to make sure the UC “runs smoothly” when introduced.

This is a shocking betrayal by Labour and clearly exposes their class credentials by assisting the Tories in this manner. The UC will cut the benefits of the poor, disabled and the young and will

drive millions more into poverty as we learn that child poverty has risen again to obscene levels.

Looking ahead a year, but in the same vein, 2014 could give us a chance to begin to challenge and break up the British capitalist establishment that controls all aspects of our lives with the opportunity to vote Yes in the Independence Referendum.

As a socialist, I just don't just want to swap flags after independence and have some sort of Scottish/tartan capitalism.

I genuinely believe a Yes vote would give the Scottish people the best opportunity, certainly in my lifetime, to deal a major blow to the British capitalist establishment. This is a real once in a lifetime opportunity to make a real difference to how and who we are governed by, and where Scots can take control and power over all their affairs.

There is one Tory MP in Scotland yet we have a Tory government who are viciously attacking the working class in Scotland. The current system is corrupt and unsustainable and needs to be challenged and changed. If you want rid of the Tories for good, then build for a Yes vote in 2014.



JIM BOLLAN



Join the SSP here

Fill in this form and send it to: Scottish Socialist Party, Suite 370, 4th Floor, Central Chambers, 93 Hope St, Glasgow G2 6LD.

Or telephone: 0781 126 5388

Or see our website: www.scottishsocialistparty.org

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

Name.....

Address.....

Phone.....

Email.....

SYRIA: NO MILITARY SOLUTION

by Bill Bonnar

WE are now witnessing the endgame in Syria and the start of a new dangerous period. The Assad regime is finished and has, in effect, been defeated. That might not be what it appears as the regimes forces carry out all out attacks on its opponents but appearances are deceptive.

The fact that the regime has been battling its opponent for more than 18 months without managing to defeat them, despite overwhelmingly superior military resources, is evidence enough. That the various opposition forces have turned what originally were sporadic protests into an all out civil war signals the end and that end will come soon.

Either the regime will completely collapse under the pressure or will desperately try to do a deal with the rebels in an attempt to end the conflict. The pre-condition of this latter option would be the removal of Assad and those around him.

Collapse

A negotiated settlement promoted by countries like Russia and representing the best option for the Syrian people now looks very unlikely and the collapse of Syria as a functioning state is now a real possibility.

In part, this is because the ruling Baathist Party appears to be both paralysed and disintegrating and therefore incapable of the kind of initiative that could lead to some kind of settlement.

Likewise, the opposition is fragmented and lacks any kind of common purpose other than to fight on until the end.

It is essentially now a broad alliance of regional, religious and tribal groups, Islamic fundamentalist organisations and disaffected elements of the regime which have switched sides.



VICTIMS OF CONFLICT: there can be no military solution which would benefit the Syrian people

In fact, there is a danger that what started as a general revolt against the regime could turn into a fragmented war being fought on a broad range of fronts around an equally broad range of interests.

The conflict in Syria cannot be separated from wider conflicts in the region and it is interesting to note the various positions adopted by foreign governments.

The United States and Israel are solidly behind the uprising and there is evidence of growing logistical support for the rebels. Both have calculated that their interests would best be served by a crippled Syria.

Iran wants to see a negotiated settlement that protects the integrity of the Syrian state and shares a common aim that neither country should become the

next Iraq. Russia also wants a negotiated settlement which derives from long term support for Syria dating back to Soviet times and fears western control of a weak and dependant post Assad Syria.

Interests

What is clear is that the collapse of the Syrian state will be and increasingly is a disaster for the people of Syria. It will not lead to greater democracy or peace and is a recipe for further conflict almost without end.

It would also objectively work in the interests of those countries which have long been the enemy of Syria and the Syrian people, in particular, the United States and Israel.

There can be no military solution which would benefit the Syrian people. Even, as is now

distinctly possible, enough government forces came over to the side of the rebels and defeat the regime; what next?

The civil war would simply move onto another phase as the various ethnic, religious and regional interests take centre stage. It would also leave the country wide open to foreign intervention as neighbouring states look to protect their interests.

Even at this late hour their can only be one solution which is in the interests of the Syrian State and people. The removal, by whatever means of President Assad and a negotiated settlement between what remains of the Baathist regime and at least some of the opposition forces.

Although this scenario looks increasingly unlikely, the alternative is disastrous.

by Sandra Webster

WITH the rise of social media such as Twitter and Facebook it is all too easy for stories to take legs and become more accessible. With the smart phone revolution, we can have images of war zones zapped immediately into our reality.

I can remember how the news was handled at the time of the Falklands conflict. It took over a week for very carefully chosen images to be fed to us the watchers, all designed to stir us up into a fervour for our soldiers far away, fighting against the Argentinians. Now we can have raw unedited footage, along with the traditional media streams.

People can share videos online that can become 'viral', where it is shared and viewed by thousands or even millions of people.

Bullying

The latest YouTube clip I saw was of a young Scottish girl physically bullying a teenage boy who turned his back on her and said "he didn't hit girls".

The video falls into a category that some seem to find amusing, young people colloquially called 'Neds' drinking, fighting, engaging in dodgy behaviour. Some people actually collect it and share it.

Sometimes such videos only receive a few viewers but they also can capture the imagination and the people involved in them become a news item. This is what happened in this incident.

I was first aware of it when I clicked on for my Facebook fix last week and saw that several people had posted how shocking this video was and the behaviour of the girl involved.

It later transpired that the boy had a learning disability and had been bullied before. Very

JUST ANOTHER ILLUMINATED SIDESHOW?



BULLYING THE BULLY? online comments were baying for blood

quickly the story grew a Facebook page was set up calling the young girl a phrase too colourful for the *Voice*. I'm a carer and many of my friends are, and I saw friends of friends were commenting on this girl and the incident calling for the return of capital punishment.

Don't get me wrong. I completely condemn bullying in any form especially disability

bullying which my sons have been victims of. If someone hurt my sons or someone I know I can't guarantee to have non-violent thoughts about them.

But surprisingly I felt some sympathy for the girl involved, especially when *The Sun* - such a friend of the oppressed - put a link to the video with comments baying for her blood. It reminded me

of the crowd with torches in the Frankenstein movies.

Although outraged and offended by her behaviour, and at the person who stood by and recorded the video, I recognised that she was someone's child. What had happened to cause her to behave in such a way?

Being different

The reasons for anti-social behaviour are not the blame of poor parenting, as the ConDems especially like to focus on, but the fault of a deeper malaise where being different is a reason to be a target.

Tensions between different groups are always different in times of economic crisis.

So before we feel hatred towards this young girl, let's remember she is all our problem. Let's look beyond the 2D video and remember two wrongs don't make a right.

I am confident that *Voice* readers are critical and look further into a story. After her week in the media gaze, the offending video has been removed from YouTube and the pack have moved on to other victims. I wonder how quickly all the people involved in this story and their families will be able to.