

Eyewitness in Athens:
Colin Fox is with Syriza
as they gain power
• see pages 2, 3 & 4



Murphy's spin: SSP's John McAllion
on why Scottish Labour remains
under tight Westminster control
• see page 9

£1 • issue 451 • 30th January – 12th February 2015
scottishsocialistvoice.wordpress.com

Scottish Socialist Voice



GREECE THROWS DOWN AUSTERITY CHALLENGE

Solidarity demands we join them

- **NO CUTS OR SACKINGS**
- **£10 MIN. WAGE FOR ALL**
- **TAX THE RICH**



PHOTO: Craig Maclean



ScottishSocialistVoice.wordpress.com



/ScottishSocialistVoice



@ssv_voice

SYRIZA: Greece elects first radical left wing government in Europe since 1930s

by Colin Fox, SSP national co-spokesperson, reporting from Athens

"CITIZENS OF Athens, tonight's success is not only a triumph for Greece it is a victory for all the people of Europe fighting austerity and neoliberalism."

This declaration was made by the new Prime Minister of Greece Alexis Tsipras as part of his acceptance speech to 100,000 of us gathered in Propylaia Square, Central Athens on Sunday to celebrate Syriza's famous win.

Greece has elected Europe's first radical left-wing government since the 1930s and again propelled itself to the forefront of the world's attention.

Syriza will soon appoint Ministers to run the Greek Government on left wing principles and they will have seats on the UN, on the General Secretariat of NATO, on the European Commission and a host of other powerful global agencies.

Impoverishment

Their remarkable victory was won for two reasons; first the Greek people are at the end of their tether after eight years of severe economic and social impoverishment and secondly they had already tried every other political alternative since 2008 and watched them fail.

Economically Greece is crippled by €319billion debts to the European Central Bank, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund or 'Troika'. They cannot pay the money back because they do not have it and their economic condition is worsening all the time.

When Greek Banks failed amid the worldwide financial collapse of 2008 the 'Troika' bailed them out to avert a run on the Euro.

But those loans and the terms of subsequent ones agreed by the

'Hope is coming. Greece is advancing. Europe is changing'

Greek Government led by PASOK [Labour Party equivalent in Greece] Prime Minister George Papandreou meant brutal cuts in Greek public spending. These meant one million jobs

were lost almost overnight [Greece's population is about 11million], wages were cut by 40 per cent, state pensions were halved, the national minimum wage was halved and massive

cuts were made to health, education and all other state services.

Consequently one of Europe's poorest countries and weakest economies took a further battering. In Greece today the official



unemployment rate is 27 per cent. For young Greeks its 65 per cent. Millions who were in full time work are now employed part time.

One million have emigrated just as hundreds of thousands of desperate immigrants from Syria, Iraq and Africa have arrived fleeing to Europe's nearest port of call.

My first impressions of Athens arriving in the city centre hub of Syntagma outside the yellow and white painted Greek Parliament was of a city on its knees. If this was the prettified tourist centre next to the world famous Acropolis it did not augur well for what I was likely to find in less 'manicured' neighbourhoods.

And my instincts were correct. For next to the headquarters of

the Bank of Greece on Stadiou Street and Venezolus Avenue [our equivalent of the Bank of England on London's Threadneedle Street] were derelict buildings, boarded up shops covered in graffiti, rough sleepers wrapped in cardboard and beggars imploring passers by for pennies.

It was all a far cry from the Athens I remember during the 2004 Olympic games.

With Syriza comrades helping to translate I visited the 'Solidarity Social and Medical Centre' in Ikitinou Street behind City Hall. Here volunteer medical staff provide a range of free medical care from dentistry to psychiatry to patients the Greek health service has turned away.

In Greece you pay for health-care directly via an insurance

scheme based upon workplace deductions. Consequently, if you lose your job, you lose access to treatment. Millions of people have lost their jobs or had their hours cut and have therefore lost access to hospital care.

Together with its partners in the burgeoning social movements, Syriza has helped to establish a network of clinics, food banks and advice bureaux across Greece. The one in Ikitinou Street is one of the busiest with hundreds of patients arriving at their door every day often in a distressed condition. There health professionals give up their spare time free of charge to provide care. All the medicines and equipment the clinic has have been donated by people and organisations sympathetic to the

work being done there.

Syriza won the election because they offered hope and strong leadership. Their election slogan 'Hope is coming. Greece is advancing. Europe is changing' could be seen everywhere.

The General Election campaign in Greece is a highly visible and expensive affair. As they have state funding of political parties those organisations already represented in Parliament have a great advantage as far as campaigns are concerned. Everywhere you went you would see commercial billboards and poster sites with Syriza's logo festooned all over them.

New Democracy, the Tories had plenty too as did the Greek Communist Party, the KKE. In fact my companions Viv and Dick from the Australian Green Left Weekly Viv and I were fascinated to see the huge [100 metre long], red hammer and sickle banners tied up throughout Syntagma Square ahead of the Communist Party's election rally. There would have been thousands there I guess and I would liked to have witnessed it but it clashed with the Syriza event along the road in Omonia Square. The KKE is no admirer of Syriza whom they dismiss as 'left-wing capitalists'.

International guests

At the final Syriza election rally organisers arranged for their international guests to have pride of place at the front. So there I was with my Scottish Socialist Party t-shirt on next to comrades from 'Die Linke' in Germany, the Portuguese Left Bloc, the French Partir de Gauche, the Brazilian Left and the Greek Solidarity Campaign from London all being photographed by hundreds of photographers and cheered by 50,000 flag waving Athenians.

Alexis Tsipras is the first Greek Prime Minister to go to state school. Born in Athens in 1974, the year the Military Junta was finally replaced he joined the Greek Communist Party as a

TSIPRAS AND IGLESIAS:
Syriza election rally in Athens



teenager and was a spokesperson at 16. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the turmoil that enveloped the Communist International he left and joined the Euro-Communist group Synapsimos, meaning 'Coalition'. Synapsimos was the driving political influence behind the creation of Syriza and he was its founding President.

Salary donations

Tsipras is a very confident and polished political performer always relaxed and comfortable when glad-handing the enormous throngs of voters who surround him wishing him well. An engineer to trade—he has been a full time political activist for more than a decade—he lives in modest rented flat in a working class district of Athens with his wife and two children. Like all Syriza MP's he donates 20 per cent of his salary to the party and a further 20 per cent to social projects like the one I visited in Ikintou Street in Athens.

His finely choreographed entrance to the Syriza election rally in Omonia Square accompanied

SCOTTISH DELEGATION: comrades from RIC and the SSP in Syriza HQ Athens



Pablo Iglesias the leader of 'Podemos' Syriza's equivalent party in Spain.

The crowd cheered and cheered at the surprise and even more so when Iglesias said [in English] "First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin"—lines from a Leonard Cohen song from the same name.

I met Tsipras and Iglesias later at the social for a photo and a chat and was tickled to learn that the Spaniard stayed in Glasgow for a year while studying geography at University.

We discussed the imminent

loniki Declaration' commits the new Government to renegotiate Greece's crippling debts with the 'Troika' and get half of them written off.

It further compels Syriza to convene a European Conference of debtor nations like Greece to discuss how they can press for wide scale debt write off to stimulate the continents economy and to lift the intolerable burden of repayment off the shoulders of the poor.

Syriza's domestic recovery programme was of course just as important in securing victory on Sunday. They promised to double the Greek state pension to €700 per month and the national minimum wage to 751 and to create 300,000 new jobs. This is all part of a plan to reflate and rebuild their shattered economy.

It goes without saying that the Thessaloniki Declaration is an ambitious programme representing a direct challenge to the most powerful neoliberal institutions in the world. And that world is watching to see what concessions, if any, Tsipras can ring out of the Troika.

'Troika' billions

Ironically the first test may come in February when Greece is due €13billion from the 'Troika' as part of the bailout agreement. The attitude both sides take to those discussions will give an early signal to the likely consequences for the Greek economy, for European

finances and for world politics. The victory for Syriza completely changes the political landscape of Europe. And yet winning the election may well be the easy part as the challenges they face are considerable.

They need to deliver help quickly as voters are understandably impatient for change and desperate.

At the same time Tsipras faces the might of neoliberal finance capital equally determined to prevent reform.

Syriza must also fight the Greek Oligarchs—shipping tycoons, media magnates, etc—who have long believed the country belongs to them.

This includes evading taxes, corrupting Government officials, monopolising the media and bypassing the democratic institutions of Greece altogether.

Syriza's leaders are therefore under no illusions about the enormity of the task facing them.

They know they cannot achieve their objectives on their own. They need the mobilised direct involvement of the Greek people beside them and they also require practical international solidarity from the 'European Left'.

And it was that latter objective which motivated the SSP Executive Committee above all to send me to Athens to do, to strengthen the party's contacts with Syriza and all the other European partners in our quest for a socialist Scotland and a democratic socialist Europe.

Syriza needs the mobilised direct involvement of the Greek people beside them and they also require practical international solidarity from the 'European Left'...

by the party's theme tune meant the atmosphere was like a rock concert. And his crafted speech spoke about 'Hope and confidence' for the future and urged voters not to be frightened by the constant threats sent to them by the outgoing Prime Minister Antonio Samaras of New Democracy.

This point reminded me of the Scottish Referendum campaign and how 'Better Together' played on people's fears and uncertainties. But Tsipras's grand finale this fine January evening—like a May event in Scotland—was to bring out from behind the stage curtain

Syriza victory, its implications for the General Election in Spain in November and the political situation in Scotland after the referendum.

I also attended Syriza public meetings in Monastiriki, Thissio, New Fildelphia, Plaka and Metaxourgio when I was there. Local candidates were introduced and questioned by voters and the Chair always took time to introduce me and the other international visitors to the audience. It was a thrill to be cheered so warmly by the Greek audiences.

Syriza's seven-point programme known as its 'Thessa-

by Ken Ferguson, editor,
Scottish Socialist Voice

Greeks choose democracy over bankers' barbarism

WILL THE needs of people be able to prevail over the extortion of the bankers and moneylenders driving austerity and misery across Europe? This is the central question posed by the stunning victory of Syriza in Greece as the new government now faces the massed ranks of a neoliberal financial elite increasingly desperate to shore up its failed economic model which has seen a tiny minority impose misery across a continent as they grew bloated on bonuses and profits.

This is, of course, just the latest episode in a centuries old struggle between a democracy using its power to meet real needs such as education, healthcare and fair pay against the rich industrialists and bankers blocking their way.

The determination of that tiny elite has, in the past led to poverty, colonialism, war and, just 70 years ago, the horrors of fascism. For the last thirty years that same elite has been clawing back the gains made on the back of the Nazi defeat through anti union laws, privatisation, pay cuts and benefit sanctions all dressed up in the infamous Thatcherite maxim TINA—there is no alternative.

Bosses policy

Indeed this policy has, in a variety of forms, been the bosses policy across not just Europe but in the US and much of the world.

Their task has been made the easier as supposed progressive parties from the US democrats to British Labour has broken with any pretence to be on the side of workers and cosied up to the needs of corporations demanding low taxes and bankers who wrecked the economy.

In the UK this reached its peak recently with Labour MPs voting with the Tories to



set a cap on public spending. The Syriza victory blows away the TINA myth and poses instead the need to use the mandate of democracy both to curb the powerful financial elites and fashion policies such as ensuring food and electricity—to meet the reality of the needs of the majority.

This is the key point rather than the endless speculation about how hard the Germans will be, how much the IMF and ECB will give or whether or not Syriza is a “real” socialist party etc. We have even had one fanciful commentator comparing Syriza to the SNP!

For the left in Scotland, the UK, Europe and world wide the Greek result presents us with two key tasks, both urgent.

Firstly we need to give full support to the new Greek government in what will surely be a David and Goliath battle with an entrenched unelected European financial elite determined to doggedly defend its world of Davos summits, private jets and West End mansions.

The SSP has already begun this work with Colin Fox reporting back on the election to public meetings. Solidarity visits, resolutions from unions and the

building of real links with those in struggle are all essential.

Secondly, here in Scotland, away perhaps from the headlines, but equally important we must step up the fight both against the cuts and to build the case for an alternative path away from austerity.

In the next few weeks local councils will meet to set budgets which will once again impose cuts on services and jobs which will further hit the most vulnerable and the fight against them needs to be redoubled.

Part of the solution can come by unions and community activists working together to fashion budgets which prioritise community needs and jobs and

point an alternative to cuts. Related to this, the SSP has for some years demanded the end to the unfair council tax and its replacement by an income based Scottish Service Tax which would both ease the burden on the low paid, make the rich pay their fair share and generate massive new resources for vital services.

Tax the rich

An updated version of the SST to be published shortly will provide another example of the real alternative that exists to austerity cuts and elite rule by the rich. The Greek result provides the first challenge to the unelected bankers in Brussels, Berlin and Frankfurt by a democratically elected government and as such is surely a potential game changer.

Others must follow their lead and step the battle to put people before profit. Given that both Tories and Labour are fully signed up to dance to the banker's tune and 80 per cent of the cuts are still to come, this is a matter that grows more urgent daily and demands that we take a leaf out of the Greek book and unflinchingly oppose austerity by all means at our disposal.

Scottish Socialist Voice SUBSCRIPTIONS

To subscribe, fill in this form and send it to: SSV, Suite 370, Central Chambers, 93 Hope St, Glasgow G2 6LD. Phone: 07810205747. Cheques/POs to 'Scottish Socialist Voice'. Or see: scottishsocialistvoice.wordpress.com

Name.....

Address.....

Phone.....

Email.....

☐ £5 for 2 issues ☐ £10 for 4 issues ☐ £20 for 8 issues

by *Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace
organiser*

THE CONTRAST could not be starker. As the people of Greece give a resounding NO! to austerity, the councillors of Scotland are poised to vote YES to another bout of municipal butchery.

Council budgets are about to be set across the country, for the next 1-3 years. The common thread in all 32 council areas is cuts: cuts to jobs, cuts to vital services, cuts to the conditions of the workforce.

Tens of millions of pounds are being slashed off local public spending—despite us all being told there's an economic recovery.

Glasgow city council—Labour controlled—are hacking another £100million off services and jobs over three years, on top of their previous cut of £175million since 2010. Vulnerable people, like those supported by Glasgow Association of Mental Health, are at the sharp end, as GAMH's budget is reduced by 40 per cent.

Job loss boasts

Edinburgh city council—run by Labour and SNP—boast of “greater efficiency” and “improved customer services” as they lop £67million off spending and plan 1,200 job losses! You couldn't make it up; well, this coalition of cuts councillors have!

North Ayrshire—SNP the ruling party—threatens another £19million over three years, hitting education and social services hard. The Labour opposition condemn this in Press Releases, but turn up to budget meetings and vote for the cuts!

West Dunbartonshire—a Labour council—wants to add another £17million to previous cuts in one of Scotland's most

DEFY ALL CUTS: there is an alternative

deprived boroughs, with school closures and an end to funding for lifeline services through two local Women's Aid Centres amongst the victims.

Dundee—SNP-run—aims to slice £8.5million off services, with school closures thrown into the mix.

North Lanarkshire—one of Labour's last bastions—threatens 1,400 job losses, with £62million in cuts this year, about £73million in the next two years.

The list goes on; a dreary litany of slash-and-burn by councillors of all the mainstream political parties—Tory, Lib Dem, Labour, even the SNP.

And they all sing the same background tune to their axe-swinging crusade: “we have a duty to balance the books”, and their all-time favourite, “there is no alternative”. The latter was also a favourite tune of the late, unlamented Margaret Thatcher as she put the boot into the working class in the 1980s; she even had her own acronym: TINA, “there is no alternative”.

It seems it never occurs to these services-cutting, jobs-slashing councillors that they should adopt the stance of the Greek people, by saying NO to ALL cuts, defying the

cuts handed down from the Tory dictatorship of and for the rich at Westminster, mounting a campaign to win back some of the £billions stolen off Scottish budgets and therefore Scottish councils over the years.

In the last 3 years alone, £3billion has been robbed off Scotland's budgets by the Westminster razor gang. As Unison reported last year, 39,300 council jobs have vanished since 2010, one of the human consequences of ‘balancing the books’.

Services slaughter

And this new round of slaughter to services will hit some of the people most in need of the social support a modern society should guarantee. For instance, 25,000 women in Scotland made their first contact with Women's Aid Centres last year, in desperate need of refuge for them and their children, as they flee domestic abuse. But in at least West Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire, North Ayrshire and Fife councils—a mixture of Labour and SNP administrations—funding for these lifeline refuges are being either slashed or entirely stopped—to ‘balance the books’.

The new modern method of implementing such cowardly butchery is to hold bogus ‘public consultation’ exercises. Councils have spent considerable sums in this charade, this pretence of giving ‘choices’ to the public.

As well as online voting, they hold public forums, sometimes with hi-tech electronic voting devices, where the elected councillors hide whilst unelected council officials carry the can, putting forward a long-list of cuts, asking people which cuts to carry out. The councillors then issue glowing Press Releases about “the biggest consultation in the council's history”, and effectively pass the blame for their own spineless acceptance of Westminster-inspired cuts to the average Joe or Josephine.

As I said in the recent live Radio Inverclyde debate with the Labour council leader Stephen McCabe, that's like offering somebody the choice of being executed by a firing squad or the hangman—but with no offer of staying alive!

These Labour (and SNP) councils have truly put the con into CONSULTATION!

Instead of offering false ‘choices’ between cutting local schools or community



BUDGETS: Scottish councils plan cuts to jobs, vital services, workforce conditions

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

facilities, teachers' jobs or street cleaning, larger school classes or cuts to women's refuges, elected councillors should be initiating genuine forums where People's Budgets could be debated, based on local needs and priorities, but underpinned by an expansion of funding from central government, rather than annual cuts.

Even at this eleventh hour in setting budgets, if Labour and SNP councillors discovered a collective spine they could as a minimum set No Cuts budgets, Defiance budgets which refuse to pass on the cuts issued by Westminster and meekly passed down by the Scottish government. Budgets with not a penny reduction in services, not a single job lost.

"But the money would run out if we did that" was the cry of Labour's Inverclyde council leader when we debated this option. Only if the councillors sat on their hands and did nothing!

If they were genuine about standing up for the people they got elected by, Labour and SNP councillors should link up with the council workforces—which constitutes a massive 246,000 workers in Scotland—through their trade

unions, alongside user groups, tenants' groups and political parties dedicated to fighting the cuts, and mount a massive campaign to win back the £millions required to 'balance the books' without a single penny in cuts.

If the SNP Holyrood government was serious about standing up for Scotland, they would go beyond ritual condemnation of Westminster's cuts and mount a campaign of mass defiance, refusing to pass on a single penny of the Tory-Lib Dem Coalition's austerity, appealing to a population awoken by the recent Referendum to take to the streets demanding "Give us back our stolen £billions—bail out jobs and services, not bankers and the rich".

Fairer 'service tax'

And meantime, as a matter of urgency, the trade unions, community organisations, councillors and political parties should thrash out a progressive alternative means of funding councils.

Funds from the Scottish government account for about 80 per cent of all council budgets. The rest mostly comes from the Council Tax.

But this is a brutally regressive tax system, where

those on lower incomes pay disproportionately far more for local services than the richest do.

The SNP government has insisted on a freeze on Council Tax bills for several years. Families struggling to cope with household bills welcome this—although the richest gain most from the freeze. Labour's response is to demand an end to the Council Tax freeze—apparently so out of touch with working class lives that they're oblivious to the pain of increased bills their option would mean.

Another false choice: added financial pressure to cut jobs and services through the SNP freeze, or an Ice Age of further cuts to disposable incomes through Labour's increased Council Tax bills.

The SSP has pioneered and campaigned for the outright abolition of the regressive, unfair Council Tax since our founding aims were written in September 1998. We want it replaced by a progressive Scottish Service Tax, based on income, on the ability to pay. An income-based tax with rising bands and rates, making the rich pay their fair share.

The last time we costed this alternative—four years ago—

it would have meant 80 per cent of people paying less, the rich minority paying a damned sight more, and the income for local jobs and services almost exactly doubling: £3.5billion a year from the Scottish Service Tax, compared to £1.8billion that year from the Council Tax.

Greek courage

Contrary to the 'TINA' brigade of councillors, there clearly IS an alternative. But it takes a bit of courage, a spirit of defiance, a readiness to give a lead to people in opposition to ongoing assaults originating in Westminster.

It would be foolish to compare the crucifying savagery of the austerity imposed by the Greek equivalents of Tory and Labour—New Democracy and PASOK—with the cuts hammering the Scottish working class. But that does not excuse the cuts here, and in fact makes it all the more shameful that Labour and SNP councillors have yet to display an ounce of the spirit and courage of the Greek people, who have risen off their knees and said "enough is enough, no more cuts".

The SSP proudly stands on the side of working class communities and council workers against this butchery, ready to join them in a campaign of defiance of all cuts, and with a fully-costed, progressive alternative means of funding an expansion of council jobs and services.

If Syriza and the people of Greece dare to defy the IMF, EU bureaucrats and European Central Bank, surely we can defy and defeat the tin-pot Tory dictatorship of capital around Cameron, win back funding for jobs and services, and start to build a Scotland based on public need, not private greed?

WORKPLACE BILLIONAIRES AND BUTTONS FOR WAGES

by *Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace
organiser*

THE CRIME of poverty pay is becoming even more criminal.

In a cheap stunt to absorb some of the growing fury of working class people at appalling hourly wage rates, even the Tory government has been obliged to 'name and shame' some of the companies not even paying the legally required national minimum wage, the pathetically low £6.50 for workers aged over 21.

The biggest company named, with the biggest number of workers denied even this pitiful hourly rate, is Swedish-owned clothes chain H&M.

Known for its fast fashion, cheap chic range, Hennes & Mauritz was founded in 1947 by Erling Persson. The current company chairman is his son, Stefan Persson. He is the world's 24th-richest billionaire, with a personal fortune of £16.01 billion. He gained from last year's 25 per cent rise in the stock value of his company, H&M.

Land ownership

But he didn't do too badly from his other sideline, land ownership in England. Last year he bought Savernake Estate in Wiltshire: no crofter's strip of land, nor modest family farm, but a colossus of 8,700 acres! And for Stefan's convenience, this latest acquisition isn't far from Linkenholt, a village in Hampshire, which he bought in 2009!

In contrast to this mind-boggling wealth, in the hands of Sweden's richest citizen, his company and primary source of wealth, H&M, dodged paying over 500 of its staff the paltry £6.50 an hour that the national minimum wage legally obliges them to pay! Billions for bosses, buttons for their workers!

That's just the stand-out exam-



ple of obscene class exploitation highlighted by the 'named and shamed' list recently published. And it shouldn't hide the more fundamental point: how the hell are workers meant to live on £6.50 an hour even when companies do pay it?

As the SSP steps up its street campaigning for a living national minimum wage of £10 an hour, legally enforced, horror stories of working people who can't cope multiply with every street stall. The woman who told me she has five part-time jobs, as a cleaner, and still can't survive the bills.

The 23-year-old hairdresser who told me she works for a major chain but is having to give up and go back to college, as she only gets £4.50 an hour actual wages, topped up to the legal minimum £6.50 through commission—which is drying up as people can't afford to spend as much on hairdos or shampoos... because of low wages!

The proud people who work part-time but still have had to resort to food banks for emergency food supplies.

Obscene levels of inequality in Scotland actually add to economic crises. Low wages suppress spending power, thereby adding to

job insecurity and unemployment. Workers getting a boost to their wages would spend it, investing in the local economy—in contrast to company bosses on unimaginable sums who just squander their wealth on luxury yachts, works of art that they often stick away in a vault...or in buying up a whole village!

But inequality is the ugly twin of poverty. The richest tenth of people in Scotland have 900 times as much wealth as the poorest tenth of the population.

That's in keeping with the global obscenity of inequality: as Oxfam recently reported, the richest 1 per cent on earth own 48 per cent of global wealth, and by 2016 the 1 per cent will own more than the other 99 per cent of humanity!

Fighting for a £10 an hour national minimum wage for all over 16—with equal pay for women—is hardly asking for the moon and the stars. It's roughly equivalent to two-thirds the median male wage in Scotland. In other words, two-thirds of the income that half of all men already get more than.

It's the minimum wage unanimously voted for at last autumn's British Trades Union Congress, which adds a mighty potential force behind the demand.

The SSP is appealing to people on the streets to raise their chins, raise their sights, and fight for a living minimum wage, legally enforced.

We are appealing to trade unionists to take up the cudgels and seriously campaign for the policy agreed by all unions representing over seven million members.

And we are arguing that such a wage is easily affordable. The biggest armies of low paid workers are massed in retail, hospitality and the care sector.

They are employed by retail giants, including supermarkets, who make £billions in profit every year, and could easily afford a decent living wage for those who make them their profits. Likewise the big chains in the fast foods and hospitality sector.

Radical change

And the battalions of low paid workers in the public sector could be afforded at least £10 an hour if governments radically changed their spending priorities. From squandering £100 billion on Trident weapons of mass destruction, and cutting tax workers' jobs whilst the rich dodge £120 billion a year in taxes, to investment in well-paid jobs in the likes of care services for children, the elderly, sick and disabled.

We live in fabulously rich country—with obscene levels of poverty. Wage levels are prime cause of that poverty, with half a million Scots working to stay below the breadline. It's time to stand up and demand a share of the growing wealth for the working class that produce it in the first place. Just as Syriza won power by, amongst other policies, pledging to restore the minimum wage to its 2010 level (double its current appalling level), so too the Scottish Socialists are determined to lead the fight for a decent living minimum wage of £10 now. Join us.

by John McAllion, ex-Labour MP/MSP, now with the SSP

Behind Murphy's tartan paint job, has anything changed?

ALMOST FROM the moment he was elected Scottish leader, Jim Murphy sought to emulate his political hero Tony Blair. One of his first announcements was to herald his own Clause 4 moment by rewriting the party's constitution with the object of giving Scottish Labour a patriotic make-over.

From here on in Labour north of the border would be a "Scotland first" party committed to "total devolution" and the creation of a "permanent and powerful Scottish Parliament". To emphasise the change he denied he had ever been a unionist and promised to use Scotland's share of the proceeds of a mansion tax levied mainly on English homeowners to pay for a 1000 more nurses in the Scottish NHS.

There followed a veritable blitzkrieg of further announcements all designed to paint Labour as the only party with the ideas and policies to exploit the new Smith Commission powers and to deliver the genuine home rule that the majority of Scottish voters wanted.

People's railway

A new publicly owned "people's railway" would take over the Scotrail franchise. There would be a ban on fracking. Limits would be placed on the number of fixed odd betting terminals in bookmakers' shops to protect low income families from the jaws of greedy gambling conglomerates.

As one Scottish academic noted, Murphy's strategy was clearly to highlight the range of powers available under the Smith proposals and to create the impression that the vow had been fulfilled and extensive devolution really delivered by the Westminster parties.

Moreover, his tactics echo the New Labour post 1997 spin offensive aimed at dictating



PHOTO: Craig Maclean

and dominating the press and broadcast media agenda.

An offensive that, like Murphy's approach, is far more about spin than substance.

The re-write of the constitution is more a re-ordering of existing clauses than the "re-founding and rebirth" of Scottish Labour that Murphy claimed. It also falls well short of an Independent Scottish labour Party genuinely freed from Westminster control that many party activists are calling for. Murphy's party will be autonomous only over those areas of policy allowed by Westminster. Westminster sovereignty over the Scottish Parliament and Scotland remains unscathed.

His "people's railway" is no more than the outside possibility of a limited publicly-owned franchise operating under a permanently privatised UK railway network. Both Murphy and UK Labour have ruled out re-nationalisation of that network. The limits on betting terminals would not apply to those that already exist and that already exploit the financially disadvantaged. Spending English taxes on Scottish nurses is part and parcel of the existing Barnett for-

mula. On the really important issues Murphy remains the British unionist he has always been. He remains committed to weapons of mass destruction on the Clyde. The £100 billion cost of Trident renewal would pay, not for 1000 Scottish nurses, but for 150,000 new nurses and teachers every year for the next 30 years. For Murphy the future of Britain's nuclear deterrent is a far higher priority than Scottish hospitals or schools.

His late conversion to the devolution of setting income tax rates to the Scottish Parliament was spun as being driven by what was in Scotland's interests. In reality, it is intended as a unionist Trojan horse. Successive Tory and Labour Governments in Westminster viewed income tax as "toxic" because most voters hate paying it. Tory and Labour governments have consistently cut the basic rate from a high of 35 per cent in 1976 to the present 20 per cent. In nearly 40 years no Westminster government has dared raise it.

In similar vein, the devolution of the right to vary the top rate of income tax is bogus. Any attempt to raise it within one part

of the United Kingdom without raising it across the UK would easily be avoided by top earners moving themselves and/or their businesses to those areas of the UK where the top rate would not apply. To make matters worse Scotland's income tax base is shrinking due to an ageing population. Westminster has devolved new tax problems not new tax powers to Scotland.

Murphy's predecessor, Johann Lamont, had resigned as leader partly because Westminster Labour had appointed senior party officers over her head. Jim has had no such problems as he has willingly populated the Scottish party at senior levels with Westminster's finest fixers and spinners. His new chief of staff, John McTernan, was Blair's director of political operations and the man who infamously described Scotland as "narrow", "Presbyterian" and "racist".

Project fear

His new policy director is Blair McDougall the author of Project Fear and a former Westminster insider who ran the Blairite David Miliband's unsuccessful leadership campaign. His new Director of Communications is a one-time Labour councillor, opponent of universal benefits and someone who described her nationalist opponents as "odd-balls, extremists and out-and-out racists". The so-called "Scotland-first" party remains under tight Westminster control and direction.

No one is fooled. The latest polls show the SNP on course to win in excess of 50 Westminster seats and Scottish Labour facing near electoral annihilation. As they sow so shall they reap.

Ewan MacColl, folksinger, socialist and giant of the folk revival was born 100 years ago this month. **Bill Scott** takes a look at his life

Remembering Ewan MacColl

EWAN MACCOLL was born Jimmie Miller in Salford ("Dirty old Town") in 1915. His father, William Miller, was an iron-moulder and communist from Stirlingshire. His mother, Betsy Hendry, also a socialist, was from Auchterarder in Perthshire.

They left Scotland after William's militant trade unionism resulted in him being sacked and black-listed. Jimmie grew up in a lively household where political meetings and parties were held where he heard the ideas, songs and music his parents had brought with them from Scotland.

Miller left school in 1930 and worked in a variety of labouring jobs and as a street-singer. That same year, he briefly joined the Workers' Theatre but soon left and formed his own political street-performers group, the "Red Megaphones".

Jimmie took part in hunger and unemployment marches (1932-33) and then met and married Joan Littlewood in 1934. She was a RADA trained actress and together they set up a workers' theatre group in Manchester.

In 1936 they established the Theatre Union which produced successful plays such as "The Last Edition" (written by MacColl) dealing with the events leading up to the Munich pact. However the play was viewed as seditious and

in 1939, a performance was halted by the police and Miller and Littlewood arrested.

Both were heavily fined and barred from taking part in any kind of theatrical activity for the next two years. That sentence and other members being called up to serve in the war curtailed Theatre Union's activities for the next six years. The group reformed in 1945 as the "Theatre Workshop". Littlewood directed and produced the plays whilst Miller wrote the plays and trained the actors in technique. From 1945-52 Jimmy wrote eleven plays a number of which were acclaimed and translated into German, French, Polish and Russian.

By this time, the Scottish folk revival had begun and, inspired by figures such as Hugh MacDiarmid, Jimmie changed his name to reflect his Scottish roots and became, henceforth, "Ewan MacColl". By 1950, Ewan divorced Joan and married the dancer Jean Newlove, by whom he had two children both of whom went on to become singers themselves (a hugely successful one in the case of Kirsty).

In 1951 Ewan and Joan Littlewood collaborated with Hamish Henderson, playwright Joe Corrie, Cllr Joe Kane and Norman Buchan in establishing and staging the first People's Festival. This was a cultural festival for the ordinary folk of Edinburgh, who had been excluded from the

International Festival by prices and snobbery.

The People's Festival staged plays, recitals and musical performances at prices ordinary folk could afford and, unlike the main Festival, celebrated the Scottish folk tradition. The People's Festival continued through to 1954 when it lost trade union financial backing after it was attacked by the Labour Party as being a "communist front". The Festival was revived and continued by the SSP in 2002. Though Joan and Ewan had continued to collaborate after their divorce this ended after the The-



EWAN MacCOLL

atre Workshop moved to the West End. Ewan then turned to his other love, traditional music. He played a leading role in nurturing the British folk revival by establishing one of the first folk clubs, the Ballads and Blues Club (later to become the Singers Club) in 1953.

Whilst running the club in 1956, he met and fell in love with the young American folk-singer Peggy Seeger (for whom he wrote "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face"). Peggy, like her half-brother Pete, had been blacklisted because of her left-wing politics and had decided to tour and perform in Europe.

Ewan left Jean Newlove and his young family and eventually married Peggy in 1959. They went on to become a great folk-singing duo and formed their own record com-

pany (Blackthorne) to publish theirs and others folk music.

In 1957 Ewan was commissioned by radio producer Charles Parker to write and appear in a number of musical documentaries for BBC which later became known as the "Radio Ballads".

It's difficult to now re-capture today how ground-breaking and influential these were at the time. Collaborating with Peggy, Ewan combined recorded interviews (with fishers, miners, navvies, etc.) with sound effects, specially written songs and traditional folk music. Popular and critically successful many of the innovations MacColl used have become standard television techniques. For some while after this MacColl worked on school broadcasts and wrote scripts and music for BBC films, television and the stage.

MacColl also continued writing new songs as well as working with Peggy to collect songs from traditional singers such as the Gypsy Travellers of Scotland and England. Many of the 300 songs he wrote were ephemeral—in support of contemporary struggles and strikes. Others such as those already mentioned, "The Shoals of Herring" and "Freeborn Man" have become standards.

In 1979, MacColl suffered the first of several heart attacks and though his health became progressively worse he continued to tour. Throughout 1984/85 he performed with Dick Gaughan and Billy Bragg to raise money for the striking miners. He died on 22 October 1989 following a heart operation.

By all accounts MacColl was a perfectionist who could be difficult to work with but his contribution to the folk revival was second to none and he left a legacy of great plays, songs and radio productions which documented working class life and struggle. Here's to the memory of the Manchester Rambler.



Join the SSP

Fill in this form and send it to: Scottish Socialist Party, Suite 370, 4th Floor, Central Chambers, 93 Hope St, Glasgow G2 6LD. Or phone: 07810205747. Or join the SSP online: scottishsocialistparty.org/join-us

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

Name.....

Address.....

Phone.....

Email.....

Bill Bonnar looks at the long running Chilcot Iraq saga

IF IT looks like a cover up and sounds like a cover up it probably is a cover up. The decision to kick the outcome of the Chilcot Inquiry into the long grass can have no other explanation than that of a whitewash.

The inquiry into Britain's involvement in the Iraq war began on 24 November 2009 and was completed on 2 February 2011; almost exactly four years ago. Why the delay? By dragging out the enquiry for years the hope is the conclusions will be lost in a fog of disinterest and cynicism.

There have also been enough leaks to suggest that the enquiry will spread the blame as widely as possible on the basis that if everyone is to blame then no one is to blame. It has also made it clear that there will be absolutely no basis for prosecutions as a result.

Yet the facts around the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq are well established. When the Bush administration came into office in 2001 it had, as a foreign policy priority, the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Baghdad. Not because Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator. The United States has supported and continues to support brutal dictatorships around the world as they once enthusiastically supported the Iraqi dictator.

Oil industry control

It was that Saddam Hussein could no longer be relied on to be their dictator. The aim was to invade and replace his regime with a dependent, pro-American government in this strategically important Arab country and to give American companies control over the Iraqi oil industry. Military preparations began immediately and the invasion was launched in 2003.

The problem was that they needed an excuse for the attack to justify it to the American people

Chilcot: if it looks like a cover up, it probably is a cover up



TONY BLAIR: a British PM willing and eager to comply with the US

and help gather together an international coalition willing to go along with Washington's plan. Central to this was the support of Britain and in Tony Blair, they had a Prime Minister willing and eager to comply. He secretly signed Britain up for the adventure while keeping his own cabinet and the British people in the dark.

The key for the Bush Administration and Tony Blair was to find the right excuse to trigger an invasion. Of course American administrations are past masters of this. The US intervention in the Korean and Vietnam were triggered by propaganda stunts to justify the actions to the American people.

Now it would be the War against Terror. They ran a propaganda campaign to convince the American public that the Baghdad regime was a major player in the promotion of international terrorism and that it was increasing its activity in this area. They even created a situation where many

Americans believed Saddam Hussein was responsible for 9/11.

As for Tony Blair, it was weapons of mass destruction. Saddam was armed the teeth with an arsenal of chemical weapons ready to attack at any minute. His own people, neighbouring countries and British forces in Cyprus were all on imminent danger. Something had to be done.

Again; all lies and it is these lies which are at the heart of the Chilcot Inquiry. Britain went to war on the basis of deliberate falsehoods and in defiance of British and world opinion and any basis of legality. If the Inquiry confirms what everyone already knows; what will that do for the credibility of governments both here and in Washington and future military actions abroad.

The Chilcot Inquiry also reveals something basic about the nature of such enquiries. These are rarely about finding out the truth and usually always about a cover-up to protect government and the state. Take the ex-

ample of the inquiry into the Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry.

Through decades of campaigning an enquiry was eventually conceded which dragged the truth kicking and screaming from the state; that British troops systematically massacred demonstrators in the Bogside in 1971.

One forgets that there were actually two government enquiries prior to this which completely exonerated the British Army: both classic whitewashes. This became evident with the publication of the third enquiry. In fact the first, under Lord Whitelaw, was so ridiculous that a new whitewash had to be constructed.

'Bearing witness'

Whitelaw's original enquiry painted a picture of young, terrified British soldiers, with their backs to the wall, facing a heavily armed IRA mob. Shooting in self-defence they showed remarkable restraint and should be honoured for their bravery! Even by the general standard of whitewashes it was embarrassing.

Of course, if the truth about the invasion of Iraq is so widely known why is the enquiry so important? To use a Christian term; it is about 'bearing witness'; making sure the historical record reads true and is not written by the war criminals.

This invasion destroyed a country and killed hundreds of thousands of innocent people. Its repercussions are still having a dramatic effect today. The people of Britain and Iraq know the truth but need this to be confirmed by the inquiry. As has been seen by the Hillsborough and Bloody Sunday inquiries this issue will not go away despite the best efforts of the state.

by David Mackenzie,
Scrap Trident Coalition

THOSE OF us who have spent years in the nuclear disarmament effort are rubbing our eyes. The UK's nuclear weapon system is publicly centre stage in a way that it has not been for years. The temptation is to think that the job is done—that it is all down now to that elite we call the decision-makers.

That would be a huge mistake. For one thing, Trident is not riding the turbulent waves of the great Scottish Stir by accident. Getting it there has depended, among other things, on focussed efforts by the peace movement in Scotland and indeed the whole of the UK, efforts that can be traced back to the almost daily blockades of Faslane during the Faslane 365 campaign and, more recently, to the work of the Scrap Trident Coalition (morphed from the No To Nato Coalition), and the factual, myth-busting output of Scottish CND.

Critical leadership

We know, too, that a topical concern can fade from public view in next to no time; that elected political leaders are ever open to the temptation of watering down or abandoning their manifesto pledges; that the scenery can and will change rapidly. In this framework it is essential that we see ourselves as the decision makers on Trident and as providing the critical leadership for elected politicians rather than the other way around.

Yesterday we were reminiscing over what it is like to take part in little pieces of civil resistance—especially against nuclear weapons, acts which are scorned by some as futile political gestures or meaningless stunts.

There is something transforming about putting your body in the way. It firmly places little local codes in their place in the

People's movement still essential to dump Trident

PHOTO: Simon Whittle



TIME FOR ACTION: blockade the Faslane nuclear base on 13 April

framework of a more universally relevant way of being human.

You gain a proper disrespect for authority. Above all, you discover some sort of agency, some sort of personal power. If the whole indyref experience meant anything at all—it was about so many people discovering and re-discovering at least the potential of people power in relation to their communities.

To fold our arms now and leave it to the generals would be to fritter away a momentum that may be only for once in a lifetime. Right now the conventional political ether is filled with speculations, promises, manoeuvrings, what-ifs and maybes. This makes distraction all too easy if you try to fit a strategy for change to a snowflake on the river. In fact the anti-Trident movement has a set of impera-

tives that will match every new flicker. At the most basic level, in spite of poll after poll showing that a majority of Scots reject Trident, there remain folk in Scotland who know very little about the UK nuclear arsenal or its malign implications.

There are even more folk who have swallowed the myths, such as that Trident's removal will lead to critical job losses or that there could be a home for the UK's Trident outside of Scotland. More need to get the point that the question of the UK's nukes is not capable of isolation from the whole fabric of concern about social justice, care for the planet and human solidarity across the globe. Public education remains vital.

Public education is best primed by citizen action. The Trident question, which has

been so visible even in the conventional media in recent months, must also remain visible on the streets. This is why the Scrap Trident Coalition is calling a national demonstration in Glasgow on 4 April, and, in the lead up to that, a series of days of action with street stalls and eye-catching stunts.

On 13 April there will be a peaceful blockade of the Faslane base when people will actively disrupt the ongoing business of that key centre of organised crime. The concept of non-violent civil resistance includes a thorough measure of care for those who will take part, with preparation workshops, detailed briefings, an outline of the likely consequences of arrest, and attention to immediate and practical welfare.

To provide that framework of care and to make the event effective we also need lots of people who will not risk arrest but will instead be the close support for those who do, or be legal observers, liaison with media, takers of film and photos, social media posters, drivers, tea-makers, banner-hangers, cooks, etc.

Anti-Trident vote

The third event is the vote on 7 May with the simple plea to people to give their positive vote to an anti-Trident party. And yet, while the general election is a key moment, it is not an end date. We must remain alert and active until the nukes are gone, every hair and feather. We hope you can join in somewhere in all of this. Our website—scraptrident.org—will soon be crammed with the necessary information.