

The Socialist Correspondent

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Still a **two** horse race



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Discussion, debate and authors' opinions: To encourage the broadest possible discussion and debate around the aims of exposing capitalism and promoting socialism, we hope our readers appreciate that not all the opinions expressed by individual authors are necessarily those of The Socialist Correspondent.

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The Socialist Correspondent

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General Election

Let there be no mistake: the forthcoming General Election in the UK is a two horse race.

As Martin S. Gibson, writes, in his article on the election, “despite what all the media politickers, pollsters and pundits tell us about the forthcoming General Election being a genuinely multi-party contest, it is still a two horse race between Labour and the Conservatives as to which party will form the next Government.”

Even if neither the Labour nor Tory parties win an overall majority, one of those parties, that which has the largest number of MPs, will form the government. Therefore, both major parties, whilst aiming for an overall majority must, as a fall back position, also aim to be the largest party in a hung parliament.

That means the Tories don't want to lose seats to UKIP nor Labour to the SNP. As the election campaign has developed the Tories are having some success in stopping the drift of their traditional voters to UKIP.

However, following the referendum in Scotland, Labour are under considerable threat from the SNP with a lot of seats at stake.

Whilst the Liberal Democrats are likely to be punished in some places for their role in the Coalition Government, they will still retain seats. And, we know that the Liberal Democrats, as one of their so-called ‘democratic principles’, will support the largest party in the new parliament.

Every seat Labour loses to the SNP will make it harder for Labour to win an overall majority and will make it more possible for the Tories to be the largest party in a hung parliament.

The SNP's claim that they will support Labour to keep out the Tories, whilst doing their utmost to defeat Labour in every seat in Scotland that they can, reflects their duplicity.

The SNP's long-held view is that



Ed Miliband

Commentary

their only way to independence was, not just the defeat but the destruction of the Labour Party in Scotland, as Scott McDonald points out in his article.

The Patriot Game

The Scottish Labour Party recently changed its statement of aims and values to say ‘we work for the patriotic interest of the people of Scotland.’

Stephen Low in his piece, “Playing the Patriotic Game”, writes, “The supposed reasoning behind the ‘patriot clause’ explicitly involved the acceptance of nationalist mythology” and he refers to the tactics of the new Scottish Leader, “Murphy is of course trying to neutralise a perceived SNP advantage, but by agreeing and emphasising that it matters how ‘Scottish’ a party is – and emphasising patriotism as a factor in politics – he risks giving those issues prominence and salience.”

As the author of the article rightly says, “These clothes are always likely to



Jim Murphy

look more flattering on the people they were designed for”, that is the SNP. In the article he argues that, “the interests of working people and their families would be a far closer rendering of Labour's interest in this, and every other, nation.”

Stephen Low concludes, “The Labour Party, and indeed people across the labour movement should have the courage and integrity to stand up for truth, for solidarity and what unites rather than divides people.”

Paul Sutton in reviewing the book, “Strange Death of Labour Scotland”, in dealing with the same issue, notes that, “structures and policies which mimic the SNP will not serve the Scottish Labour Party well.”

He continues that the Scottish Labour Party, “must take an approach which marries its Scottish vocation to an approach that consolidates the Union with the rest of the UK as well ... Scottish Labour needs to work

closely with the Labour Party in the rest of the UK and vice versa.”

Having looked at the Quebec/Canada experience and in drawing the review to a conclusion, Paul Sutton writes, “The best way for Scottish Labour to defeat the SNP is to contain it by promoting an altogether wider vision than the SNP can possibly articulate.”



Syria, Saudi Arabia and Charlie Hebdo

Pat Turnbull contributes short pieces on Syria and Saudi Arabia, which remind us of imperialism's historical and continuing negative role in these countries and in the wider Middle East. Now that Saudi Arabia and the other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council are bombing Yemen it is as well to be reminded that Saudi Arabia was the harbinger of ISIS.

It is also as well to remember, at this time of a General Election in Britain, that it was Ed Miliband who stopped Britain going fully to war in Syria. The likely outcome would have meant the defeat of Assad and ending up with ISIS in charge.

If Islamic fundamentalism is a problem, created in large part by imperialism, then so is Imperialism's way of handling it.

Frieda Park in her article, “Charlie Hebdo and the roots of terrorism”, comments that the mainstream media in dealing with the events surround-

CHARLIE HEBDO

ing the Charlie Hebdo case, framed it “simplistically as freedom of speech versus Muslim extremists: as upholding western liberal and democratic values against by implication, non-western, illiberal and anti-democratic values.

As she writes, “even the most inventive satirist could not have come up with the idea of a march in defence of free speech and against terrorism led by ... a representative of Saudi Arabia and Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel.”

Only Labour can beat the Tories

7 MAY
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ELECTION

Despite what all the media politickers, pollsters and pundits tell us about the forthcoming General Election being a genuinely multi-party contest, it is still a two horse race between Labour and the Conservatives as to which party will form the next Government.

By **MARTIN S. GIBSON**

No matter what the other parties argue - especially the Scottish nationalists about a vote for the SNP being the best way to 'lock out' the Tories from No.10 Downing Street (see page 7, Scott McDonald) - the arithmetic and past parliamentary practice means the leader of the party which wins the largest number of seats - ie MPs - will be invited by Her Royal Majesty to form the next Government.

In the General Election *May 2015* *Poll of Polls* published in the *Independent* newspaper on 11 April, it puts the main UK parties in the following positions:

1. Labour - 34%;
2. Tories - 32%;
3. UKIP - 15%;
4. Lib-Dems - 9%;
5. Greens - 4%.

In addition, the *BBC Poll of Polls* has also - since November 2014 - had Labour narrowly ahead of the Tories and more often than not on 34%. The polls have been up and down for the Tories most of the time - down at 30% and up at 34%.

Back in October 2014, one poll - by *Survation* for the europhobic *Daily Mail* - put the europhobic UKIP at a staggering 25% and LibDems at 7%.

But that was last year when UKIP were the flavour of the month with the europhobic and jingoistic Tory press. Then there were UKIP's two sensational By-election victories - Clacton-on-Sea on 9 October and Rochester & Strood on 6 November - created deliberately by two Tory MPs defecting to UKIP.

But as the months wore on and it became increasingly more likely that Ed Miliband and Labour could beat the Tories, the Tory press has focused less on giving UKIP an easy time of it and more on Tory leader, David Cameron's key message: 'go to bed with Nigel

Farage and you wake up with Ed Miliband'.

This Tory press hostility to UKIP - as the election has drawn nearer - may well account for UKIP failing to gain traction in the polls: losing some 10% in the space of six months, from that high of



25% in October 2014 to 15% today.

As if to emphasise this very point, at UKIP's manifesto launch in Thurrock, Essex on 15 April a reporter representing the staunchly Conservative *Daily Telegraph* asked Farage if he thought it was acceptable that the only black face in the whole UKIP manifesto was in the section on immigration.

The room - full of UKIP supporters at the front and a smaller posse of news reporters at the back - erupted into derisory clapping and jeering, in which Farage took part, at the *Daily Telegraph* reporter.

In this correspondent's opinion this was a deliberate, calculated challenge - nay accusation of racism against Farage

and UKIP - by a representative of the Tory party's main broadsheet mouth-piece, the *Telegraph* which reveals the deep fear the Conservatives have that in Tory heartlands and marginals, UKIP could be losing them the general election.

Such an outcome would bring to a grinding halt their long term plan for five more years of even more austere cuts across the whole of Britain's public services, including the NHS.

But worse than that, the Conservative party's hierarchy fear that Ed Miliband could prove to be the most left of centre Prime Minister the country has had for decades.

So there is much at stake in this election like no other for the people of Britain and especially in Scotland where the political mood - at the time of writing - does not look good for Labour.

It will be eight months or thereabouts since Scotland convincingly voted NO to independence in the referendum.

The echoes of that referendum are still ringing in folk's ears; some Saltires are still being flown; some YES wristbands are still being worn; and the SNP is still riding high in the opinion polls, especially their new leader, Nicola Sturgeon.

But there might just be a straw in the Scottish wind.

In the first televised UK General Election debate in Scotland on BBC Scotland which came from Aberdeen in the north east of Scotland - SNP territory which voted No in the referendum - the new SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon was asked if she still held to her view - which she expressed in the run-up to the referendum last September - that it was a 'once in a generation event'.

She hummed and hawed and then, when she was eventually forced to answer the question, she said, 'If the people of Scotland don't vote for a party with a commitment in a manifesto to a referendum (ie, if people don't vote for the SNP - Ed.) there won't be another referendum'.

In plain English this means she has certainly not given up on the idea of holding another referendum and is seri-

ously considering including such a pledge in the SNP's May 2016 Scottish Parliament election manifesto.

Ms Sturgeon repeated her position on the *BBC's Andrew Marr Show* (19 April) when she said she had no plans currently for another referendum but if there was a 'substantive change in circumstances' another referendum could not be ruled out.

If she does include it she knows full well it can be "lost" among a long list of election pledges from getting rid of Trident nuclear submarines from the Clyde to full fiscal autonomy for Scotland.

If - as the polls predict - the SNP win the Scottish Parliament election in 2016 and do so on a manifesto pledge to hold another independence referendum she can - like her predecessor Alex Salmond - claim she is simply fulfilling the will of the Scottish people.

When this likelihood dawned on the Aberdeenshire audience they very audibly groaned and some even booed, leaving Ms Sturgeon visibly shaken for the first time in her brief tenure as leader of Scotland's largest party of over 100,000 members.

What's behind this nationalist nevrendum psychosis is their belief that the decisive 55% for NO and 45% for YES referendum was like a game of football and that it's only half-time, with the second half still to be played.

When it's put to them that it was in fact a full time victory for NO - a once in a lifetime victory - and that that game is really over, their angst, anger and utter discombobulation are palpable.

The Aberdeen groan of disapproval at the thought of another long, bitter and deeply divisive referendum - is, I suspect, how most of Scotland - No and Yes - feels about such a depressing and undemocratic prospect.

Even one of Scotland's wealthiest nationalists who campaigned hard for a Yes vote - the millionaire Monaco tax exile businessman, Jim McColl of Clyde Blowers Capital - believes the referendum result was indeed a once in a lifetime issue.

Still a strong SNP supporter, he argued recently for full fiscal autonomy for Scotland - a key UK General Election manifesto demand of the SNP.

But unlike his new SNP leader, Mr McColl does not believe it's only half time: he told BBC Scotland that the referendum issue has now been 'settled'. And so say all of us!

The Aberdeen groan at Sturgeon's weasel words was the first solid evidence - the straw in the Scottish wind - that the SNP and its shiny, new, popular leader may not be as teflon-coated as the

pollsters say they are.

Her opponents' problem - especially Scottish Labour - is that they may not have enough time before 7 May or indeed be capable of exposing the nationalists' weaknesses and flaws.

Witness the fact that Scottish Labour - as Stephen Low elaborates on page 8 - has chosen once again to confront Scottish nationalism with its old, opportunistic, unprincipled and failed phony Home Rule nationalism in the hope that playing the patriot game will bring it success.

No matter how hard they have tried they still cannot nor ever will out-Nat the Nats.



Nigel Farage



Nicola Sturgeon



David Cameron

The crest of the independence referendum wave for the SNP is still pretty high and currently the UK General Election polls in Scotland are leading pundits and pollsters alike to predict big losses for Scottish Labour - who hold 40 out of the 59 Scottish seats at present - and also the Conservatives' coalition partners these past five years, the Scottish LibDems.

If the SNP are hell bent on re-running the independence referendum within the next 30 years, then it could prove to be most unpopular.

But that's a risk they seem determined to take. Sturgeon won't rule out another referendum because it is central to their strategy of winning independence

by hook or by crook. That strategy is being played out in this General Election campaign and it involves the UK's membership of the European Union (EU).

Europe at the heart of the SNP's strategy for separation from the UK

As Scott McDonald argues on page 7, the best result for the SNP is a Tory government and better still a Tory-led coalition with anti-EU UKIP, not the pro-EU LibDems.

The only party that supports David Cameron's pledge to hold an In-Out referendum on Britain's continued membership of the EU is UKIP.

The only difference between them is that Cameron wants it in 2017 and UKIP wants it yesterday.

Cameron needs time to negotiate a new deal with Brussels; one he could recommend to the British people and keep the UK in the EU. UKIP want out of the EU full stop Both want different outcomes from an In-Out referendum and both know it can only come about if the Tories come first in the election.

The SNP is very pro-EU and have already argued that if Britain votes Yes to leaving the EU in 2017 but Scotland votes No, Scotland should have the sovereign right - as a nation - to choose to remain in the EU.

And the only way that can come about is if Scotland separates itself from the UK and becomes an independent state: cue another bitter and divisive Scottish independence referendum.

That's why Sturgeon won't rule out another Scottish referendum. The SNP's favoured strategic timeline and outcomes could read something like:

- May 2015 - Tories win the UK General Election and SNP rout Labour in Scotland;
- May 2016 - SNP landslide victory in Scottish Parliament Election;
- 2017 - In-Out EU Referendum - Britain votes Yes to leave EU, Scotland votes No;
- 2018 - SNP demand another Scottish independence referendum. If it's refused they make a Unilateral Declaration of Independence to keep Scotland in the EU.

All of this is possible: but only if the Tories come first or win a clear majority on 7 May.

UK Labour-led coalition is possible

Just precisely how the many predictions of how Scotland and the rest of the UK will vote on 7 May will translate into seats in the 650 seat House of Commons under the constituency by constituency first-past-the-post system is anybody's guess.

The magic number to attain a one seat

parliamentary majority is 326 seats.

In the 2015 General Election the percentage of the vote and the share of House of Commons seats was:

Cons	36.4%	- 306 seats;
Lab	29%	- 258 seats;
LibDem	23%	- 57 seats;
UKIP	3.1%	- 0 seats;
Others	8.5%	- 29 seats.

Pollsters themselves say their calculations come with a 3% margin of error either way - a total of 6%. Turning percentages into Parliamentary seats is highly unpredictable. However, based on the above *May 2015 Poll of Polls* - a possible outcome is as follows:

1. Labour	34%	- 303 seats;
2. Tories	32%	- 272 seats;
3. UKIP	15%	- 26 seats;
4. LibDems	9%	- 22 seats;
5. Greens	4%	- 3 seats;
6. Others	6%	- 24 seats.

If that is close to the UK-wide result on 7 May and if past practice is adhered to, it will be Labour's Ed Miliband whom the Queen will call to Buckingham Palace after polling on Thursday 7 May.

What the "genuinely" multi-party contest will determine, if no party wins an overall majority, is whether or not we have a minority or a coalition government: if things turn out as the above *May 2015 Poll of Polls* predicts it is likely that Labour won't have an outright 326 majority of seats in the House of Commons. We could, therefore, have a minority Labour Government or a Labour-led coalition Government.

To reach 326, Labour would need the LibDems' 22 seats plus the Greens 3 seats which would give them a coalition total of 328, two more than the magic 326. Then there is the 'prosperity not austerity' Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) of Northern Ireland who won three seats in 2010.

If that kind of coalition was put together - according to my calculations - Labour may not need the SNP. That is one of the reasons why Ed Miliband has rejected the nationalists' offer of doing a 'lock out the Tories' deal before 7 May. Another is that a pre-election deal with the SNP would be interpreted by Scottish Labour voters that it's alright to vote SNP.

On 8 May 2015 however, it is just possible - if the *May 2015 Poll of Polls* is accurate - that Britain could have its first-ever Labour-LibDem-Green-SDLP coalition Government with a Parliamentary majority of about six.

With the Greens' highly popular manifesto pledge to nationalise the railways and the SDLP's opposition to any more austerity, such a coalition may produce

the most progressive UK Government for many decades.

Ed Miliband and Labour coming top of the polls makes that possible which is why the Tories are so vehement in their attacks on him politically and personally



Tory Defence Secretary, Michael Fallon's claim that Ed 'stabbed his brother (David) in the back' to become Labour leader is the lowest point yet in a campaign that may well plumb the depths even further.

If on the other hand the vote on 7 May goes the Tories' way it is almost certain we will have another Conservative-led coalition - possibly with the right wing and racist UKIP this time as the Tories' partners. Such a coalition could be further to the right than any Government in this or the last century, even Thatcher!

At the launch of UKIP's election manifesto Nigel Farage denied he had had any 'formal' talks with the Conservatives

about a deal to form a Tory-UKIP coalition. What he didn't deny is that UKIP and Tories have been informally "feeling" each other out about what happens after 7 May.

Farage's price for doing a formal deal with the Tories - if it comes to that - will almost certainly be about Europe.

At his Thurrock manifesto launch the UKIP leader joked that if the Tories did choose a new leader after the election, 'Maybe they should elect someone who really is a Conservative.'

Farage's price could well be the "pro-Europe" Cameron's head on a plate.

What is absolutely crucial now - before 7 May - is not so much who

will coalesce with whom - but who comes out on top on 7 May. For it is a two horse race and only Labour can beat the austerity-heavy Tories.

What do the main parties offer the British working class?

In the important realm of parliamentary party politics in Britain today the socialist opposition to capitalism is arguably at an all-time low ebb.

Even the many minor political parties - from 5 to 16 (see table) - who in 2010 were able to garner more votes than the "independent" Speaker of the House of Commons, former Tory MP, John Bercow, have fundamentally nothing to offer Britain's 46 million voters that goes

How the main and minor political parties fared in the last UK General Election in 2010

- 1. Conservatives** - 10.7 million votes and [306] seats;
- 2. Labour** - 8.6m [258];
- 3. Liberal Democrats** - 6.8m [57];
- 4. UK Independence Party** - 0.9m [0/2]. (UKIP won two seats from the Conservatives in by-elections in 2014.)
- 5. British National Party** - 0.56m [0];
- 6. Scottish National Party** - 0.49m [6];
- 7. Green Party** - 0.26m [1];
- 8. Sinn Fein (NI)** - 0.17m [5]; (Sinn Fein take no part in the House of Commons)
- 9. Democratic Unionist Party (NI)** - 0.16m [8];
- 10. Plaid Cymru** - 0.16m [3];
- 11. Social Democratic & Labour Party (NI)** - 0.11m [3];
- 12. Ulster Conservatives & Unionists (NI)** - 0.10 [0];
- 13. English Democrats** - 0.06m [0];
- 14. Alliance (NI)** - 0.04m [0];
- 15. Respect** - 0.03m (1);
- 16. Traditonal Unionist Voice (NI)** - 0.03m [0].

anywhere beyond the horizons of capitalism.

One exception - at No.15 - is George Galloway MP and his Respect Party.

All four of the main UK party contenders - Labour, Tories, UKIP and LibDems - and the Scottish and Welsh nationalists, offer only to manage capitalism and some offer options and policies to manage it more fairly, in a way that they hope can mitigate its worst excesses. None seek to abolish it.

The Labour Party, founded as it was by the TUC and to which the majority of Britain's trades unions are still affiliated, is - whatever some people think of it - still the mass party of the British working class.

For many trades unionists and Labour loyalists that is more than enough for them to vote Labour.

But there are other reasons to vote Labour - not just anti-Tory ones - although that would also be reason enough for many working people to vote Labour.

So what are some of the reasons for working people to vote Labour:

1. Labour pledges to raise the national minimum wage to £8;
2. Labour will end zero hours contracts;
3. Labour will abolish the bedroom tax;
4. Labour will introduce a Mansion Tax on houses worth over £2 million and use that revenue to fund the NHS;
5. Labour will build 200,000 homes a year.

Labour also say they 'will balance the books' and 'cut the deficit every year' which is political speak for cuts, for continued austerity.

Under Labour it will be 'austerity-lite'. Under the Tories it will be very much more of their 'austerity-heavy' that we have had for the past five years. Only Labour can beat the austerity-heavy Tories.

US technology giant Apple has reported the largest quarterly profit - for the three months to December 2014 - ever made by a public company of \$18 billion (£11.8 billion).

At the same time Apple Inc. was criticised for the labour practices of its contractors and its environmental and business practices. Apple Inc. topped the previous highest quarterly profit of

nearly \$16 billion by US oil giant Exxon Mobil.

Between them, these two US companies make \$12 billion profit every month, enough to pay off Britain's national deficit - currently standing at £90 billion we are told - in around 30 weeks and still have enough left over to report annual profits of £54 billion.

Obscene capitalist gargantuan greed that knows no limits. Britain has a national deficit not because Labour "wasted" money on the NHS or vital public services, but because - in 2008 - a Labour government borrowed to bail-out our crisis-ridden banks to the tune of £500 billion - over five times our current deficit.

And what I have yet to read is one manifesto that would tell us how they'd fill our gaols with the blackmailing crooks in suits who stole our money.

I'm off to read again Karl Marx's and Fredrick Engels' wonderful and incomparable, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), far better than any of the parties' manifestoes in this UK General Election.

SNP aims to destroy Scottish Labour and win independence

By SCOTT McDONALD

The SNP's long-held view is that their best way to independence was, not just the defeat, but the destruction of the Labour Party in Scotland.

Donald Dewar, former Labour Party leader and the first First Minister of Scotland, pointed out that "the SNP had made it brutally clear that its top political priority was the destruction of the Labour Party." (quoted in *Maria Fyfe, A Problem like Maria*, page 161, Luath Press, 2014).

The SNP now believe that they are closer to achieving this than at any time in their history.

However, the SNP have a problem. The strong anti-Tory sentiment in Scotland has meant that many people, who vote SNP in Scottish elections, vote Labour at UK elections to keep out the Tories. The Scottish Parliament was established in 1999 and this has been the trend for several elections.

Tactically, the SNP, in trying to deal with this problem in the forthcoming UK General Election, have adopted a position that their Westminster MPs would support a Labour government.

Thus they try to make the case that voting SNP in traditionally Labour seats in Scotland would not be detrimental to Labour forming the next UK government. When challenged with the issue that the party with the most seats fol-

lowing the election will get to form the government and that could mean the Tory party, their response has been that they would vote against the first budget of that government.

What this doesn't deal with is that a minority Tory government, supported by other right-wing parties including UKIP, DUP, could survive any vote of 'no confidence' if supported by the LibDems.

The Liberal Democrats, given their past actions and what they see as a democratic principle, will support the largest party and that means, if the Tories are the largest party, the Liberal Democrats will join them in coalition as was the case following the last election.

It is crucial to be the largest party. The SNP taking Labour seats will jeopardise this and could well result in another Tory government.

Leaked memo

When the *Daily Telegraph* reported a leaked memo from the Scotland Office stating that Nicola Sturgeon would prefer a Tory government it was vehemently denied by the SNP.

However, as *The Socialist Correspondent* stated in a previous issue, "A Tory/UKIP government at Westminster would be regarded by the SNP as an-

other boost for their prospects of winning independence for Scotland." (*Where now for politics in Britain: Scotland votes NO but it's still not over*, page 8, Issue 21, Winter 2014).

The best result for the SNP and its quest for independence would be for them to take enough seats from Labour in Scotland to usher in the Tories.

That would create a good platform for them to be re-elected as the next Scottish government in 2016 and to use the overwhelming anti-Tory position in Scotland to take forward their campaign for independence either by declaration or another referendum.

Nicola Sturgeon in an article in the *Daily Telegraph* wrote, "I repeat my challenge to Ed Miliband - if together our parties have the parliamentary numbers required after 7 May, and regardless of which is the biggest party, will he and Labour join with us in locking David Cameron out of Downing St."

The SNP tactics are clear: to persuade voters that voting for the SNP is in fact a vote to elect a Labour government and that people should not worry about voting SNP.

If this tactic succeeds and the SNP take a lot of seats from Labour then we could have a Tory government at Westminster and be further down the road to an independent Scotland.

Scottish Labour plays patriot game

An otherwise unremarkable tenement flat in the street next to mine had a flagpole installed last year. After a break of a few months it is once again flying a large Saltire.

By **STEPHEN LOW**

A few weeks ago the Scottish Labour Party changed its statement of aims and values to say, “we work for the patriotic interest of the people of Scotland.”

These two things probably aren’t connected other than they both say something about Scotland’s ‘new political situation’.

This is one where the Patriot Game seems like the only one in town, or at least the only one that anyone seems interested in playing. This isn’t a state of affairs that anyone on the left in Scotland or beyond should be happy with because the ‘new political situation’ is simply a euphemism for an upsurge in nationalism, and the Patriot Game is one the working class can’t win.

The ‘patriot clause’ (Clause 4 - renumbered from Clause 2 for marketing purposes) was not the only change endorsed at the Scottish Labour Conference in February - but it was the only bone of contention.

The existing practice whereby policy for devolved issues is made by the Scottish Labour Party was made more explicit, as was commitment to the Scottish parliament.

In essence, though the current statement of aims and values, based on Tony Blair’s (pictured) Clause 4 (the one which changed Labour from being a party with a mission to being a party with a mission statement) wasn’t significantly altered, it just had the words ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scottish’ inserted at every feasible point. “The Party of moderate progress within the bounds of the law” - talked of in *The Good Soldier Schweik* is now - “the Scottish party of moderate progress for Scotland within the bounds of the Scottish law.”

Far from being contentious when outlined these changes were met with a range of responses which stemmed from “aye whatever” to “if you think it will help”. The ‘Patriot clause’ though is a

different matter.

The detailed changes were presented first to the party’s Scottish Executive where amendments to remove the ‘patriotic interest’ were voted down. It was then voted on at Conference.

In line with procedure, as it was technically a rule change proposed by the Scottish Executive of the Party, no amendments were permitted, the entirety of the statement had to be either accepted or rejected in its entirety.

The Conference ‘debate’ featured eight speakers for and only one against: a bravura performance from Unite delegate, Vince Mills, citing Keir Hardie’s remarks about how those who had prof-



Tony Blair



Jim Murphy

ited from imperialism were those who urged patriotism on the working class.

The heroic efforts of the speakers for the change in avoiding the issue at hand made for a bleakly comedic session. The vote for 69% to 31% against serves to conceal as much as it reveals.

There was miniscule enthusiasm for the change at the party’s grassroots, quite the reverse. Many had spent the two years before the Independence referendum defining themselves against parochial notions of patriotism (often taking considerable abuse in the process).

The only argument sustained in the

run up to the conference was that it would be too much of an embarrassment to Jim Murphy (pictured) to vote this down in the run up to an election.

On the day Unite and UNISON voted against, other unions and a number of CLPs abstained, although figures on how many and thus what level of actual support the measure obtained have not been and probably never will be made available.

The purpose behind the move is fairly obvious, in fact worthwhile. The SNP are widely, but wrongly, perceived as being the people who stand up for Scotland.

This is an attempt at taking some of that ground back. Labour clearly needs to do something to get itself into public debate, unsurprisingly perhaps the very New Labour new Scottish Labour leadership are more interested in buying into current prejudices and beliefs than challenging them.

Becoming more Scottish is the option that has been chosen, rather than the more challenging one of offering a programme radical enough to displace the politics of identity.

Saying Labour will govern in “the patriotic interest” doesn’t make life easier for the party. Labour would do better by countering nationalist myths, not buying into them.

It isn’t a distinct or compelling appeal to say that Labour intends to “work for the patriotic interest”: any tax exile or homophobic bus monopolist can say the same.

“The interests of working people and their families” would be a far closer rendering of Labour’s interest in this, and every other, nation.

The supposed reasoning behind the ‘patriot clause’ explicitly involved the acceptance of nationalist mythology. The idea was Jim Murphy’s, or at least announced by him, in a speech where alongside a number of worthwhile observations and aspirations he stated, “We will make it clear that we are both a democratic socialist party and a patriotic party. We are a socialist party yes, but we recognise that our political faith grew out of something deeper which is

ingrained in our Scottish character.

“It was there before our party in the beauty of Burns’ poetry, the economic vision of New Lanark, the actions of the highlanders who stood against brutal landlords.”

Leaving aside (for now) an uneasiness around bringing ideas about ‘national character’ into politics. This is fiction, not history. The idea that the labour movement arose from a sense of national rather than class identity would get you a bad fail in any history class.

Whilst our movement has had no lack of Scottish specificities, as Labour Historian and Labour Party member Ewan Gibbs put it, “To be clear the Scottish labour movement and Party were largely formed out of struggles against Scottish employers and more broadly opposition to a specific Scottish set of political traditions - ‘Unionism’ and Liberalism - within the broader British context. The idea that it was anything other than class antagonism that was behind this and especially the consolidation of the ILP and then Labour in Scotland is just nonsense.

“Of course specific Scottish circumstances, history and cultural facets had an influence but this is very distinct from ‘patriotism’ ... I’d have to fail any essays my students hand me arguing our movement was established out of patriotic sentiment, not due to some disagreement of ‘opinion’ but because the historical evidence just doesn’t exist to substantiate that sort of wild claim.”

The Labour Party, the Labour movement, doesn’t have its roots in Burns’ poetry, or the economic vision of New Lanark. Apart from anything else the vision on display in New Lanark was social and industrial, rather than economic, and it belonged to Robert Owen who was Welsh.

These aren’t the only departures from fact in Mr Murphy’s speech, which was much mocked by more historically aware members of the Scottish Labour executive

Jim is hardly the first person to jettison historical truth to construct a patriotic narrative, indeed if that is the game being played it’s almost essential.

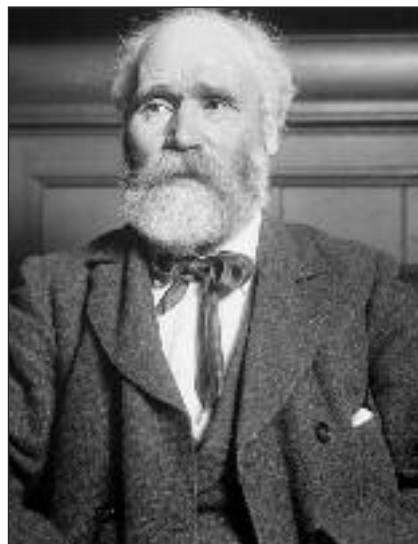
It is also in fairness, a perfect fit, with current Scottish politics which is fast becoming an environment where facts don’t matter.

Scottish Labour, who are in favour of a mansion tax, banning zero hour contracts in public spending contracts and making the living wage compulsory in all public procurement, are ‘Red Tories’ to be driven out.

The SNP on the other hand, despite voting against all of these proposals, pre-



New Lanark cotton mills on the River Clyde, established in 1786 by David Dale and his son-in-law, the utopian socialist Welshman, Robert Owen.



Keir Hardie

siding over 60 000 redundancies in public services, the loss of 140,000 college places all the while boasting of keeping business taxes low and promising various tax cuts to big business are ‘to the left of labour’ and ‘anti austerity’.

Needless to say the historical record is hardly sacrosanct in this process, the historic support of the labour movement for ‘Home Rule’ is inaccurately equated with current nationalist proposals for ‘full fiscal autonomy’.

This is usually accompanied with an entirely fictional narrative of betrayal of Scottish radicalism by a UK leadership. This element is imported to shore up a narrative around treachery of “the vow”.

The inconvenient reality that Westminster has exceeded the announced timetable for further devolution makes

little impact. There are various examples of this but the regular column by SNP MSP Joan McAlpine in the *Daily Record* is a continuous source of such material.

But is this a game Labour should even want to play? Would an adherence to the facts and the reality of a movement founded on the objective experience of class rather than the ‘imagined community’ of patriotism not be better? It is, after all, what makes the party distinctively ‘Labour’

Labour should base what they say and do on what is true, on what happened, not the creation of convenient or cosy myths. Keir Hardie’s (pictured) politics, and the Labour Party, arose not out of something ingrained in the Scottish character, but as a reflection of and response to, poverty and exploitation amidst growing plenty.

The misery of mill and mine created the desire for justice and the realisation that only by uniting as workers could better be achieved. Crying social need and awareness of the power of acting collectively was the driving force – not as Mr Murphy and many nationalists would argue “something deeper” somehow derived from being Scottish.

This is of course why the same movement was being brought into being, across the UK, and the industrialising world. If Keir Hardie embodied “something deeper ingrained in our Scottish character” it seems odd that it was the electorates of West Ham and Merthyr Tydfil who were most receptive to the man who had been blacklisted by the Scottish coal owners.

The claim that a ‘patriot clause’ in Labour’s aims and values reflects our movement’s founding aims or ethos, makes no sense. That, however is merely foolish for exposing the party to ridicule (just wait until the next time the history curriculum is talked about in Parliament...). It’s the buying into the myth that we have an ingrained national character that is more worrying.

The idea that a nation has some sort of ingrained character is of course hardly a new one. But if we are to endorse the idea that “political faith” comes from “something deeper” in the Scottish character - unless a truly unique status for the Scottish Labour Party is being claimed - then the idea is also being endorsed that “political faiths” can develop out of “something deeper” ingrained in say, the German, Hungarian or Croatian character.

These and many other countries have movements dedicated to arguing for precisely this notion. Put bluntly these movements are made up of people who

are not our friends.

It is in any case a fallacy: 'national character', insofar as it can be said to exist at all, is not ingrained, there is no "something deeper." It is hugely changeable.

Scotland in my father's lifetime has gone from voting majority Tory, to being a Labour stronghold, to seeing the rise of nationalism. Similar big transformations - including depressingly the recent rise in nationalism - can be exemplified all across Europe. Far from being ingrained, 'national character' changes as circumstances change, it is the product of a myriad of factors - not the least of which is the level of class struggle.

But quite apart from the justifications offered having no factual basis, a promise "to govern in the patriotic interest" doesn't so much solve a problem, as create a rod for Labour's back. If it is to have any practical application what can it be other than a declaration that tartanry trumps solidarity.

Does it mean for example that Labour would support an SNP government in Holyrood arguing for more money from a UK Labour government in order to hold down business rates in Scotland, at the expense of social spending in the rest of the UK?

That would certainly match "the patriotic interest". But it hardly squares with any conception of socialist or labour values.

And where is the "patriotic interest" in not devolving abortion law? There are several reasons why doing so would be a terrible idea - and a debt of gratitude is owed to Labour's negotiators on the Smith Commission for stopping it - but they aren't patriotic ones.

Murphy is of course trying to neutralise a perceived SNP advantage, but by agreeing and emphasising that it matters how 'Scottish' a party is - and emphasising patriotism as a factor in politics - he risks giving those issues prominence and salience.

This of course is quite likely to work in the SNP's favour. These clothes are always likely to look more flattering on

"...bourgeois nationalism, which drugs the minds of the workers, stultifies and disunites them in order that the bourgeoisie may lead them by the halter - such is the fundamental fact of the times. Those who seek to serve the proletariat must unite the workers of all nations, and unswervingly fight bourgeois nationalism, domestic and foreign."



Lenin: *Critical Remarks on the National Question 1913.*

the people they were designed for. If politics is to be about, for example, who will create a patriotic parliament - a commitment in a labour party political broadcast - the SNP are by definition serious contenders.

Serious enough though those concerns are, there are wider considerations. Are we to believe that a competition around greatest identification with the patrie represents a progressive development? I'm not going to credit Jim with the level of cynicism some people do - but it's not too great a departure from the dictum of "policies not personalities" to observe he's a fairly hard nosed operator.

It's difficult to believe this has been done from a sense of mission. It has happened because that's what the polling evidence is telling him needs to be done. This is where Scottish politics is now - to get permission to be heard you have to be seen to be, and only be "speaking for Scotland". This isn't progressive at all it's the opposite.

Nationalism has been on the rise, not just here but across Europe. Getting arguments across based on sense rather than Saltire is a challenge. No one denies it. But it is a challenge all of us on the left must face. Scotland already has too many people and parties who will equate progress with patriotism.

The Labour Party, and indeed people across the labour movement should have

the courage and integrity to stand up for truth, for solidarity and what unites rather than divides people.

Such observations are hardly new and though they may seem novel or particularly acute in a Scottish context, neither are the problems: "...bourgeois nationalism, which drugs the minds of the workers, stultifies and disunites them in order that the bourgeoisie may lead them by the halter—such is the fundamental fact of the times. Those who seek to serve the proletariat must unite the workers of all nations, and unswervingly fight bourgeois nationalism, domestic and foreign." Lenin: *Critical Remarks on the National Question 1913.*

The people's flag isn't a white cross on blue - it's deepest red. We forget that at our peril.

The general flag waving and transformation of the SNP into a mass party is indicative not of some anti-austerity radicalism but Nationalism. Those who would argue otherwise should remember that nationalist movements do not arise in a vacuum.

Neither do they argue for support by saying that removing the foreign influence will make people poorer.

Stephen Low is a member of the Scottish Labour Party. He blogs occasionally at <http://www.notesonnationalism.typepad.com/theblog/>

The Socialist Correspondent

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Labour must tackle the housing crisis

The Lyons Housing Review is a report from the Housing Commission, set up by Ed Miliband. The report's title is 'Mobilising across the nation to build the homes our children need'.

By **PAT TURNBULL**

The Lyons Review Commissioners deliberated for nine months and received 400 submissions. Their recommendations, however, were limited by one particular restriction, as Lord Lyons explains in his foreword: 'We have ... based our recommendations on current levels of public expenditure and those planned for the coming years.' Not surprisingly he describes the task as 'a big challenge'.

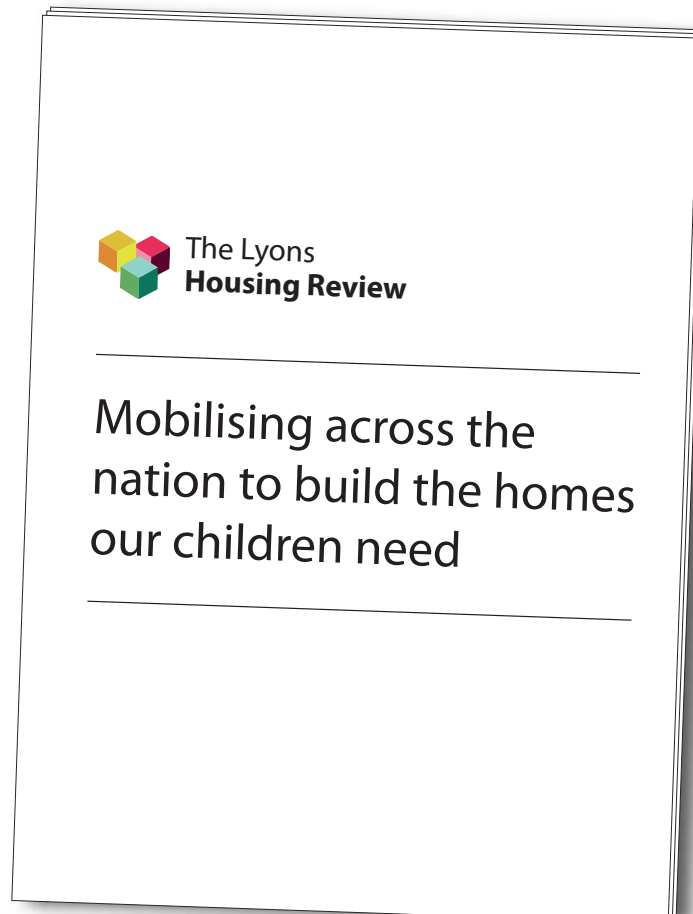
These were the Lyons Review Commissioners:

- **Tom Bloxham**, Chairman and Co-Founder, Urban Splash;
- **Mark Clare**, Group Chief Executive, Barratt Developments Plc;
- **Julia Evans**, formerly Chief Executive, National Federation of Builders, now Chief Executive, Building Services Research and Information Association;
- **Kate Henderson**, Chief Executive, Town and Country Planning Association;
- **Bill Hughes**, Managing Director, Legal and General Property;
- **Grainia Long**, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Housing;
- **Simon Marsh**, Head of Planning Policy, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds;
- **David Orr**, Chief Executive, National Housing Federation;
- **Richard Parker**, Partner and Head of Housing, PwC;
- **Malcolm Sharp**, Immediate Past President, Planning Officers' Society;
- **Cllr Ed Turner**, Deputy Leader, Oxford City Council and Lecturer, Aston University; and,
- **Prof Cecilia Wong**, Professor of Spatial Planning, University of Manchester.

It is disappointing that no representatives of tenants' organisations or trade unions were asked to be part of the commission.

The Executive Summary highlights

some of the problems arising from what it describes as 'the biggest housing crisis in a generation' continuing, 'We need to



build at least 243,000 homes a year to keep up with the number of new households being formed ... we have only managed an average of 137,000 homes a year over the last ten years ...

'The average home now costs eight times the average wage. The 2011 Census shows that there were one million more children living in the private rented sector than ten years previously.'

In this substantial report there is a section entitled: 'Councils: returning to a historic responsibility to build affordable housing'. The report says: 'Councils have an important leadership role to play in bringing forward new supply of affordable housing ... councils can enable developers and Housing Associations to proceed with schemes that otherwise would struggle to be viable ...'

The use of the word 'enable' dispiritingly brings to mind the title of the government's Elphicke-House Report (Department of Communities and Local Government, January 2015): 'From statutory provider to Housing Delivery Enabler: review into the local authority role in housing supply'.

However, the Lyons Report continues more encouragingly to talk about council house building: 'Councils are also returning to building on their own account ... starts rose to 1,920 in 2013/14 ... output could rise to about 5,600 units per year over the next five years' – but '... this is small compared to 200,000 in 1968 ...'

The report highlights some of the limitations leading to this

tiny number of council house starts: '... the new self-financing arrangements also imposed caps on the amount councils can borrow for housing. The borrowing caps are not linked to the value of the assets and so do not reflect the full potential for prudential borrowing. Average debt at £17,100 per property compares to an estimated average value of £30,000 ...'

‘Birmingham City Council currently plans to build over 2,000 new homes in ten years ... If the cap were lifted it argues that it could build a further 18,000 new homes by 2031, meeting a quarter of the city’s overall housing requirement.’

The picture is muddled by the report’s use of terms like ‘affordable social homes’ since the term ‘affordable’ is now widely used for housing such as ‘affordable’ rent (up to 80% of market rent), part rent/part buy, and even sub-market homes for sale – all actually unaffordable to millions of people in parts of the country.

The report highlights a strange anomaly in the way housing debt is treated in Britain compared with other European countries: ‘... the way local government borrowing for housing is treated against public debt is peculiar to the UK ... most governments measure “general government” debt which would exclude council housing because it is self-financing and that elsewhere in Europe, borrowing by local authorities is treated in the same way as Housing Associations.’ Housing Associations in Britain can borrow freely while councils cannot.

But the report continues: ‘However, this is clearly a complex area and may have wider implications for the UK’s fiscal rules’ and continues ‘...It must be recognised that concerns for public expenditure control are likely to make early removal of the cap difficult for any government ...’ A bit of a let off for Labour, possibly.

Another interesting section is ‘Reforming the Right to Buy’.

The report says: ‘... About one third of properties sold are now privately rented, at much higher rents than that often paid through housing benefit. The review also heard concerns that the increasing incidence of Right to Buy homes becoming low quality private rented accommodation was in danger of undermining the original objective of strengthening communities by ensuring a higher level of owner occupation.

‘Right to Buy has failed to provide sufficient receipts to allow landlords to replace stock ... Councils’ submissions [highlight] the added danger any new homes they could build could be sold at heavy discounts after only 15 years.’

In view of this situation the commission makes ‘Recommendation 38: Right to Buy – Reform the Right to Buy to enable councils and Housing Associations to re-invest in genuine one-for-one replacement ... an early review of the Right to Buy ...’

Housing Associations are envisaged as major partners in the councils’ ‘enabling’

role. The report gives details of London & Quadrant Housing Association which ‘highly impressed’ the reviewers. They mention its ‘... greater emphasis on private finance ... [its] annual turnover has increased from £188 million in 2007 to £579 million in 2013 with its annual surplus increasing from £44 million to £174 million over the same period. Management costs have reduced from £550 to £496 per home ... They have grown from 50,000 homes to 71,000 homes ...’

Whether these figures are interpreted positively or negatively – and whatever the implications for L&Q’s employees and tenants – if Housing Associations are expected to be providers of the equivalent of council social rented homes, the picture is not rosy. ‘L&Q is planning £12 billion new investment and 50,000

... the review provides a mass of evidence that current government policy does not meet people’s needs and does not meet the government’s stated aim of reducing public spending.

new homes – 50% for market rent and sale providing cross subsidy for 50% affordable rent and shared ownership ...’

The section entitled ‘The dilemma of investment that depends on higher rents’ highlights the problem of finance: ‘The 2010 Spending Review saw capital investment in housing cut by 63 per cent in real terms – the biggest cut to any government capital budget and a fundamental cut in government support ...’

‘The Affordable Homes Programme requires the higher rents [up to 80 per cent of market rent] to be charged for most new homes and for a proportion of current lettings to be converted to them. Homes sold through Right to Buy also have to be replaced with Affordable Rent units. During 2012/13, just over 40,000 homes were let at Affordable Rents which would previously have been at social rents ...’

‘Affordable Rent units built in just this parliament will add around £5.4 billion to the housing benefit bill over 30 years ... One third of working households in the social rented sector need housing benefit, up from 20 per cent in 2009/10. Social sector rents have risen by about 46 per cent in the last decade while average earnings have increased by only 28 per cent ... A full analysis of rent policy is beyond the scope of this review ...’

‘About half a million more people depend on housing benefit now than in 2010 ... Roughly 60% of housing bene-

fit supports social sector rents. There is now a huge contrast between the cost of doing this – over £40 billion over three years – and the much lower £3 billion investment in affordable homes over the same period.

‘At the same time, 40 per cent of housing benefit spending will go to the tenants of private landlords – over £9 billion per year – and this is not linked either to quality of service or investment in the stock. In the 1970s only one-fifth of public spending on housing was on rent subsidies with the rest channelled directly into house building. If the same ratio were to apply today, an additional £19 billion a year would potentially be available, funding 175,000 new homes.

‘... By reducing the amount of genuinely affordable homes and leaving the private rented sector as the only option for many in need, governments have effectively broadened the base of dependant households, who are more vulnerable to changing economic conditions and to rent rises.

‘The case for moving from ‘benefits to bricks’ is well-established; it has been made a principle by Ed Miliband ... this call is strongly supported by the review ... the need for affordable homes will not be met without subsidy ... it is more cost effective for that subsidy to be in the form of capital investment (grant, long term loans or land) rather than an ever increasing housing benefit bill which shifts the burden of funding to future generations ...’

‘John Healey MP’s work found that ... homes in social rent ... pay back the additional capital outlay through housing benefit savings after only 12 years. They pay back the full grant investment within 27 years ... Affordable Rents ... do not pay back the initial grant over the 30-year period the work covered.’

So the Lyons Housing Review provides a mass of evidence that current government housing policy does not meet people’s needs and does not even meet the government’s stated aim of reducing public spending. It gives plenty of scope to a future government to reverse many negative elements of housing policy.

The emphasis on building homes at social rent is welcome. What would not be welcome would be a short-term diversion of funds from welfare benefits to house building. In current circumstances this would only leave people on low wages and with high housing costs in even more dire circumstances than they are now.

Would Labour raise government expenditure on housing – the only way to start to tackle Britain’s housing crisis?

Greek elections and the rise of Syriza

The election in Greece on 25 January 2015 resulted in victory for Syriza. The party fell short by two seats of an overall majority and so entered a coalition with the Independent Greeks (ANEL).

By **ALEX DAVIDSON**

Austerity and other measures imposed on Greece by the Troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) led to huge wage and pension cuts, poverty, homelessness and 25.8% unemployment: for the age-group 15-24 it is 50.6%.

The election results reflected the great discontent and anger of the people against New Democracy, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and the Democratic Left (DIMAR), parties, who formed the pro-austerity governing coalition, which plunged the people into poverty and unemployment. (See graph for Election results for 2012 and 2015 and in a separate table, the electoral rise of Syriza).

Syriza reflected this great discontent and anger amongst the people and in its anti-austerity programme gained widespread support becoming a populist party.

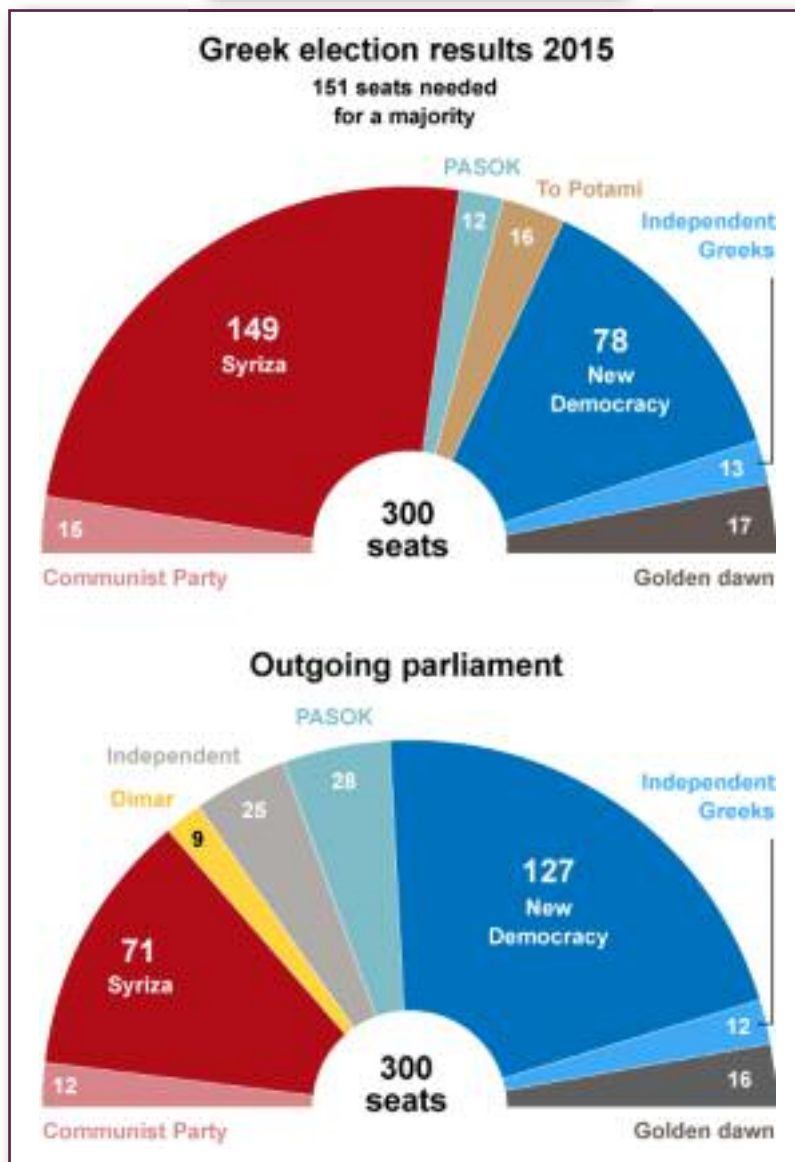
It has maintained its commitment to remaining in the EU and NATO although many in its ranks do not subscribe to that position. It gave hope to the people that there was an alternative to the harsh austerity measures inflicted on them by the Troika.

With its victory in the



25 January election, Syriza - the Coalition of the Radical Left - formed a coalition government with the Independent Greeks, a right-wing nationalist party. This surprised some commentators.

However, the origins, development and leadership of Syriza as well as its relationship with the only other party on the left with seats in Parliament, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), helps explain its choice of coalition partner.



Syriza's origins and rise

In 1988, the KKE and other left-wing parties and organisations, including the former Eurocommunist KKE (interior), formed the Coalition of the Left and Progress (Synaspismos).

In the June 1989 election Synaspismos gained 13.1% of the vote.

In 1991 the KKE withdrew from Synaspismos.

Syriza was formally launched before the 2004 election but the roots of its formation can be traced back to the Space for Dialogue for the Unity and Common Action of the Left.

The "Space" was composed of various organisations. It gave birth to some electoral alliances for the local election of 2002. The "Space" also provided the common ground from which several of the member organisations launched the Greek Social Forum, part of the European Social Forum.

Some of the participants in the "Space" sought to develop a common platform that could lead to an electoral alliance and this eventually led to the formation of

the Coalition of the Radical Left, in January 2004.

Among the parties forming the Coalition of the Radical Left in 2004 were Synaspismos, the Renewing Communist Ecological Left, the Internationalist Workers Left and the Movement for the United in Action Left.

In the election of 2004 the Coalition gained 241,539 votes (3.3% of the total votes cast) and six members were elected to parliament. All six were members of Synaspismos, the largest of the Coalition parties.

In 2006 the 4th European Social Forum was held in Athens and helped to strengthen the Coalition as did a number of successful local election campaigns held that year. The Coalition was headed by Alexis Tsipras (pictured), a member of Synaspismos.

In the 2007 national election the Coalition of the Radical Left increased its vote by 120,000, gaining 5.04% of the total vote. The Coalition had expanded from its original composition and now included the Communist Organisation of Greece (KOE) and the Democratic Social Movement (DIKKI).

In 2008 the 5th party congress of Synaspismos elected Tsipras as party president.

In the national election of October 2009, Syriza won 4.6% of the vote (below its 2007 result) and returned 13 MPs, including Tsipras, who became parliamentary leader.

In June 2010, the “Renewing Wing” of radical social democrats in Synaspismos split and at the same time left Syriza. This reduced Syriza’s parliamentary group to 9 MPs. The 4 MPs who left, formed a new party, the Democratic Left.

2012 election

In the election of May 2012, Syriza polled over 16% and quadrupled its number of seats, becoming the second largest party in parliament, behind New Democracy. Syriza rejected a proposal to join a coalition government with the pro-austerity parties.

In the second general election in June



Greece’s new Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras in Bologna, Italy during the 2014 European Elections.

2012, Syriza re-registered as a single party instead of as a coalition in order to be eligible to receive the 50 “bonus” seats given to the largest polling party under the Greek electoral system.

Although Syriza increased its vote to just under 27%, New Democracy polled 2.8% more and claimed the bonus seats. Syriza with 71 parliamentary seats be-

came the main parliamentary opposition to the governing coalition of New Democracy, PASOK and the Democratic Left.

In June 2013 a congress of Syriza was held to discuss the organisation of the party. A decision in principle was taken to dissolve the participating parties in Syriza in favour of a unitary party.

Tsipras was elected leader with 74% of the votes. The Left Platform, which wanted to leave the door open to quitting the euro, secured 30% of the seats on Syriza’s central committee.

In the 2014 European elections Syriza was placed first with 26.5% of the vote, ahead of New Democracy on 22.7%.

After the Greek Parliament failed to elect a new President by 29 December 2014 the parliament was dissolved and an election was called for 25 January 2015.

In the election Syriza won 36% of the vote, almost nine points more than the governing New Democracy party. As the largest party Syriza gained the 50 bonus seats to give it a total of 149 seats out of the 300 seats in parliament.

Although New Democracy lost the election the biggest losers in the governing pro-austerity coalition were PASOK (down 7.6% points with the loss of 20 seats) and DIMAR (the Democratic Left).

DIMAR’s vote went down to 0.5% of



Syriza’s electoral rise (2004-2015)

Date	Vote	%	Seats
2004	241,539	3.3%	6/300
2007	361,211	5.0%	14/300
2009	315,627	4.6%	13/300
05/2012	1,061,265	16.8%	52/300
06/2012	1,655,022	26.9%	71/300
2015	2,246,064	36.3%	149/300

the vote and so was below the 3% threshold needed to gain MPs. They lost all 9 of their MPs and now have no members of parliament.

On 26 January Syriza's Alexis Tsipras and Independent Greeks leader, Panos Kammenos agreed to form an "anti-austerity coalition" government.

Independent Greeks

The Independent Greeks Party (ANEL) was created in February 2012 by Pannos Kammenos, a former New Democracy MP. Among the founding members of the party were 10 former New Democracy deputies.

New Democracy is a right-wing Conservative party and was the previous government, which signed off the Memorandum with the Troika leading to the bailout and the harsh economic measures.

Kammenos had been expelled from the New Democracy parliamentary group after voting against the New Democracy led coalition in 2012.

Later in 2012 the small left-wing anti-bailout party, Panhellenic Citizen Chariot reached an election cooperation agreement with the Independent Greeks. The Panhellenic Citizen Chariot party was formed by two MPs splitting from the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)

The Independent Greeks called for the revoking of the Memorandums of Agreement with the Troika. In opposing the memorandums Kammenos said that Greece had become a "laboratory animal" in an austerity experiment conducted by the IMF and EU, who "used the public debt as a means of control".

He also said that "Germany is not treating Greece as a partner but as its master ... It tries to turn a Europe of independent states into a Europe dominated by Germany." The party also calls for German war reparations for the invasion and occupation of Greece in the second world war.

The Independent Greeks oppose multiculturalism and want to reduce immigration.

ANEL's Kammenos has been appointed Defence Minister in the Syriza-Independent Greeks coalition government.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE)
In advance of the election the KKE had ruled out collaborating with Syriza.

In a statement the KKE said, 'Syriza has abandoned its radical demagoguery, especially in relation to membership of the imperialist inter-state union that is the EU. Its president Alexis Tsipras has repeatedly made clear that Greece will

retain membership, stating that "We must observe the founding treaties of the EU, this is an absolute obligation."

'Tsipras is equally clear on the issue of Greece's membership of Nato, stating that, "Our country is committed to the institutional framework and agreements in relation to Nato." A Syriza government would continue to provide Nato with access to Greek airspace and waters, the use of its infrastructure and the Suda base from which it can continue to butcher people.

'It would continue to provide frigates for Nato missions in the Indian Ocean and elsewhere. We would continue to be entangled in imperialist plans in a region full of flashpoints and tensions - the Aegean, Cyprus ... Some say we are hasty to judge. That we should wait and see how Syriza in government will operate. But Syriza is not an untried, untested political force.



'It supported the Maastricht Treaty. It supported Greece's accession to the euro. In local government it supported reactionary changes to industrial relations and hiving off municipal services to NGOs.'

So, there was and is no prospect of the KKE going into a coalition with Syriza.

Following the election result, the KKE General Secretary, Dimitris Koutsoumpas (pictured above), issued a statement, which included the following: 'As a whole, the election results reflect the great discontent and anger of the people against ND and PASOK, the

parties that plunged the people into poverty and unemployment during the economic crisis.

'Of course they express to a great extent the false hope that the new government of SYRIZA might follow a political line in favour of the people.

'Based on the official statements and positions of SYRIZA before and during the election campaign, the KKE has assessed that the new composition of the Parliament and the formation of a government of SYRIZA ... will follow the beaten track: the EU one way street, the commitments to big capital, monopolies, the EU and NATO with the negative implications for our people and the country. Once again the people will pay the price for these choices...

'... As a whole, we assess that the line of counterattack and rupture with the capitalist path of development, the EU and against the policies that support this path through assimilation and passivity must be strengthened among the people and the movement.'

PASOK

Since 2012, and joining the pro-austerity government, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) has been disintegrating. Many members in the last few years left to join Syriza.

Former Prime Minister and leader, George Papandreou, departed and founded the Movement of Democrats and Socialists, which won 2.4% of the vote and so fell below the 3% threshold and has no members of parliament.

PASOK in 2009 had 43.9% of the vote. That fell to 13.2% and then 12.3% in the two elections in 2012. In the 2015 election it fell further to 4.7% and is now the smallest of the seven parties represented in parliament.

PASOK, as the leading Social Democrat party in Greece over many years, has largely now disintegrated with many of its members, supporters and voters moving to Syriza.

Golden Dawn

This neo-nazi party, despite being shut out of the mainstream media, the freezing of state funding and its leadership being imprisoned awaiting trial on organised crime charges, managed to maintain its vote. It is now the third largest party in parliament.

Conclusion

Depending on the outcome of the negotiations, Greece could proceed in a variety of directions: compromise and less austerity; capitulation to the Troika dictate and continued austerity; or continued struggle and exit from the Eurozone.

Fiscal and monetary waterboarding

The negotiations between the Syriza-led Greek government and the Eurozone group in February saw compromise emerge from confrontation.

By **ALEX MITCHELL**

The American author Howard Zinn once wrote that the most revolutionary act one can engage in is to tell the truth.⁽¹⁾

When the incoming Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis (pictured) said that the Eurozone was treating a case of insolvency as if it was a liquidity issue, the president of the European Central Bank (ECB) Mario Draghi told him to keep his opinion to himself.

The chair of the Eurozone finance ministers group, Jeroen Dijsselbloem also took offence and refused to speak to Varoufakis during a crucial stage of the talks.

Varoufakis walked out of one meeting when a compromise paper agreed with the European Commission was unexpectedly withdrawn by Dijsselbloem. Reporters told of a break-down of trust between the Greek government and its creditors.⁽²⁾

Varoufakis' game plan was to obtain short-term financing to provide a six month window for negotiations on restructuring the €317 billion debt owed by the Greek government to the Eurozone, ECB, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other banks and venture funds.

Debt repayments in 2015 alone will amount to €21.4 billion (equal to 11% of national income). There is no way that Greece can afford this level of repayment and the government will default unless agreement can be reached on debt restructuring.

Uncertainty aroused by constant talk of Greece leaving the euro has led to Greeks withholding payment of taxes and moving their savings abroad. Greek banks have been haemorrhaging cash at the rate of a billion euro a week and the government might be forced to introduce curbs on withdrawals as had happened in Cyprus a few months earlier. But the ECB was unwilling to stand behind the issuance of more debt by the



Yanis Varoufakis

Greek government without an agreement on a reform plan.

For the German government it was a matter of principle that the new Greek government honoured the commitments made by the previous PASOK and New Democracy governments; otherwise, they feared, other governments might also

try to disown 'bail-outs'.

In Washington, the Americans were worried that European intransigence could drive Syriza into Russian arms. Barack Obama criticised the European insistence on austerity, telling CNN: "You cannot keep on squeezing countries that are in the midst of a depression". Washington put pressure on the IMF and the Germans to compromise.

Over a fraught fortnight in February a form of words was found to satisfy the Greek and German positions. Syriza would not accept the terms of the previous Memorandum of Understanding or a reform plan which meant further austerity.

Through a process described by Varoufakis as an exercise in "constructive ambiguity", the Greek government agreed to seek further European funds "on the basis of the conditions in the current arrangement."

This was described as a climb down by the rest of the EU, but the words imply that a new "contract for recovery and growth" will be negotiated upon the foundations of the discredited Memorandum. Syriza's list of reforms differs from those previously agreed but was nevertheless accepted as a starting point for further talks.

The tussle over the contents of the next reform plan will pit the neoliberals against the left. The €2.2 billion privatization programme of the port of Piraeus and 14 regional airports, which have already been tendered, and the electricity company are big areas of contention.

Even more important, are the labour market 'reforms', designed to weaken working people's rights and opportunities and improve 'competitiveness'.

Reversing the sacking of public employees will also be resisted by the Eurozone group. Lastly, there is a concern that cracking down on the oligarch's tax evasion - as revealed by the 'Lagarde list' of 1,991 rich Greeks holding accounts with HSBC - might appear anti-business and dissuade investors who want to be free to export their profits to some cosy tax haven.

The Eurozone and ruling class voices like the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* magazine still expect Syriza's leader Alexis Tsipras to be forced to perform a kolotumba (a summersault), lose face and his majority in the parliament, and be removed from power within weeks.

If the Eurozone governments and the European Commission fail to find a consensus over the reform plan, the ECB will shut-off support to the Greek banking system. Monetary instability could prompt new elections or even a military coup.

Varoufakis described the austerity imposed by EU policies as fiscal waterboarding; their monetary equivalent could be even more painful; but just as the Greek people have survived the former they can survive the latter.

In Russia during the 1990s, western pressure led the central bank to restrict the money supply as a means of curbing rampant inflation. This meant that salaries could not be paid and led to job cuts and rising poverty.

Business enterprises took to issuing promissory notes, known as veksel, to settle transactions. In effect, veksel were a parallel currency to the rouble. The *Financial Times*' economic commentator Wolfgang Münchau has suggested that the Greeks could issue a euro denominated parallel currency to survive an

Britain should stop interfering in Syria

Syria has a population of 17,951,639 according to a 2014 estimate. The countries on its borders are playing a big role in prolonging and worsening the current war: Syria is bordered by Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south, and Israel to the south west.

By **PAT TURNBULL**

From 1516 until the end of the First World War, Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire, which, along with its allies Germany and Austro-Hungary, lost the war. Its Near and Middle Eastern regions were carved up by France and Britain, the victorious parties.

Syria's future borders were decided when the war was still being fought. In 1916 two diplomats, Francois Georges-Picot for France, and Mark Sykes for Britain, determined that Syria would be part of the French zone of influence and Iraq part of the British - the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

Oil was discovered in the region of Mosul - north-east of Syria, north-west of Iraq - just before the end of the war, and in 1918 the British negotiated a change in the border to add this region to Zone B, the British influenced zone. Thus Syria has very little oil while Iraq has a lot.

The border was recognized internationally in 1920 when Syria became a League of Nations mandate and has not

changed to date.

In the 1920s there were revolts against the French, particularly one led by Sultan al-Atrash who won several battles. This revolt lasted from 1925 to 1927, even though France sent thousands of troops to Syria from Morocco and Senegal.

Under this kind of pressure, France negotiated a treaty of independence in September 1936, but the French Legislature refused to ratify it. However, in April 1946 the French were forced to evacuate troops, leaving Syria in the hands of a republican government.

In 1948 Syria was involved in the Arab-Israeli war over Palestine. In 1967 in the 6-day war, Israel captured two-thirds of the Golan Heights, part of Syria. In the October war of 1973 Egypt and Syria in coordination advanced to re-take their lands held by Israel since 1967.

However, Syria could hold the Golan Heights only briefly and in the end had to sign a disadvantageous disengage-

ment agreement with Israel in May 1974. Here Syria felt she was let down by other Arab nations.

For thirty years until their withdrawal in 2005, Syrian troops were in Lebanon. Their presence there was sanctioned in 1976 by the Arab League.

While it is too complex to go into here, the war in Lebanon, which cost thousands of lives, was essentially the result of Israel's determination to root out the Palestinian liberation forces from the country.

Syria has been involved in several attempts to set up unions of Arab states, the longest lasting being the United Arab Republic with Egypt from 1958 to 1961.

For many decades, Syria had good relations with the Soviet Union, as it now has with Russia. In November 1956 Syria and the Soviet Union signed a pact which included delivery of military equipment to Syria, and Syria is currently Russia's seventh largest arms client.

Under an agreement of 1971 the Soviet Union established a naval base at Tartus on Syria's Mediterranean coast. This is now a Russian naval base and Russia's only base on the Mediterranean. There have been talks about the development and enlargement of the base.

Continued on page 19

Fiscal and monetary waterboarding

ECB-induced credit crunch. Moreover, in the age of internet banking, people and companies can transact their business online and as long as they have an account in another Eurozone country the fact that Greek banks might be forced to bolt their doors for a while would be an inconvenience and not a disaster.

Greek society is pretty homogeneous and patriotic and they will not crack if the ATMs stop working. That said, debt restructuring will not of itself restore Greece to health. With unemployment close to 30%, Syriza needs to create jobs

in the public services and through investment in infrastructure. Yanis Varoufakis is disliked by his neoliberal peers because he was prepared to tell them that their prescription was killing the patient and that Europe has to change course.

Two years ago, he set out a Keynesian-inspired 'modest proposal' with his friend Jamie Galbraith to stimulate the depressed European economy through investment in infrastructure.

An even more modest version of this modest proposal is already being implemented by the European Commission

under Jean-Claude Juncker. The pieces in the Varoufakis game plan are all in position but the flash points of privatization, re-hiring of sacked public servants and an increase in the minimum wage could easily lead the Eurozone group to order a dose of monetary waterboarding - collective punishment for speaking truth to power.

FOOTNOTES

1. Howard Zinn, *Marx in Soho: A Play on History* (1999).
2. From stories reported by the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* during February and March 2015.

Charlie Hebdo & the roots of terrorism

The saturation coverage of the killings in Paris in January of 12 staff at *Charlie Hebdo* magazine and subsequently five others plus the three alleged killers, has not quite managed to smother the serious questions raised by these events.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

The mainstream media framed it simplistically as freedom of speech versus Muslim extremists: as upholding western liberal and democratic values against, by implication, non-western, illiberal and anti-democratic values. Much was implied through what was said and not said and the imagery used.

The pomp that surrounded the funerals of the victims in France and Israel gave a message of power and rectitude. These are not the desperate looking killers whose mug-shots appeared on TV.

These are proper civilised countries, yet “civilised” countries which have been responsible for inflicting murder and human suffering on a vast scale.

This hypocrisy is one of the first challenges to the good versus evil narrative of the media.

Even the most inventive satirist could not have come up with the idea of a march in defence of free speech and against terrorism led by, among others, a representative of Saudi Arabia and Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. What about Gaza? What about the blogger flogged in Saudi Arabia?

Furthermore what about the person arrested in France for approving of the killings or the staff member sacked from *Charlie Hebdo* for making an anti-Semitic remark?

Free speech always has its limits, where people disagree is over where those limits should be set. After the killings, the defence of *Charlie Hebdo's* right to publish what it chose sometimes took the form of re-printing the specifically anti-Islamic content of the magazine.

This gave implicit approval to those cartoons and added to the hostile climate being stoked up against Muslims. Whilst *Charlie Hebdo* had the legal right to publish what it did, that did not make it the right thing to do.

War and violence have often been perpetrated in the name of religion, but behind that ideological justification lie politics and economics.

The Crusades were no more about the Christian religion than the Paris attacks were about Islam. Terrorism and conflict in the North of Ireland was framed for us here in Britain as a religious conflict, but we know that it originated not in the different branches of Christianity, but in British imperialist oppression and partition. Despite its alleged culpability in that conflict, however, Christianity was never questioned as a faith in the way that Islam is now.

The religious form of terrorist acts

CHARLIE HEBDO

committed in the name of Islam obscures their social, political and economic roots. Imperialism is both directly and indirectly responsible for the growth of extremism.

Directly it has created and supported terrorist organisations like Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, where he was used as a proxy in the overthrow of the government and the fight against the Soviet Union.

As reported in the last issue of *The Socialist Correspondent*, funding for Islamic State comes from the West's allies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.⁽¹⁾

Western countries have encouraged Islamic militias as part of their strategy to overthrow, or attempt to overthrow, governments that they do not like.

Wars in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria involving variously the United States, Britain, France and others have created chaos.

With a lack of credible authority or government, militias have stepped in to

fill these vacuums. Revulsion at the killings and devastation caused by Western powers has also helped recruit fighters to these organisations.

These are some of the global forces that create and sustain terrorist organisations. However, there are forces within western countries themselves which drive individuals, like the Kouachi brothers, into the hands of these reactionary groups. Muslims everywhere can see the hypocrisy of the West's wars and Israel's oppression of the Palestinians which go unchecked.

At the same time they are asked to be accountable for the acts of a minority, for which they have no responsibility.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles asked in his letter to mosques that Muslims demonstrate how Islam “can be part of British identity”. These are not demands placed on other sections of the population and reinforces the perception that Islam is more alien than other religions.

By contrast after the Paris attacks Mr Pickles joined Home Secretary Theresa May in holding up placards saying “Je suis Juif.” (I am Jewish) at a service in London, organised by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Fear and division is being fomented within and between Muslim and Jewish communities across Europe. In this poisonous political and social mix the far right and religious extremists feed off each other, just as abroad imperialism and terrorist militias are two sides of the same coin.

In a further ironic twist the climate of fear being whipped up has seen proposals to further curtail civil liberties.

But there is another issue which is only mentioned obliquely and that is class. People of Muslim, mainly North African, descent in France are often poor and marginalised inhabiting the notorious Banlieues, the housing estates on the outskirts of French cities.

The Kouachis were products of this kind of impoverished background. One set of statistics speaks volumes about inequality in France. Muslims comprise 60% of the prison population across the country (even higher in urban areas) but only 8% of the population as a whole.⁽²⁾

“Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” - the values said to be under attack from terrorists are clearly in short supply in the Banlieues.

It is difficult to completely distinguish religion, culture and ethnicity in terms of how individuals and communities identify themselves. So when *Charlie Hebdo* makes lampooning Islam in crude and racist terms a cause, it will inevitably be alienating already oppressed Muslim communities further and giving succour to the right and religious extremists. How is that helpful?

Satire does not belong in a different category to other forms of writing or art - it either plays a progressive role or a reactionary one. It cannot excuse itself as being transgressive or challenging and therefore anything goes. Transgressing

what? Challenging what?

Sure *Charlie Hebdo* lampooned other religions in offensive terms, but that does not make their anti-Islamic cartoons any less offensive and especially not in the context of racism and oppression in France. In this situation lampooning the Pope is not the equivalent of lampooning the Prophet.

The editor of *Charlie Hebdo* who was killed in the attack, Stéphane Charbonnier, has been described as a “militant atheist” and a Communist, who cartooned regularly for *L'Humanité*, the paper close to the French Communist Party.

To be an atheist is fine, however, to be a militant atheist is to miss the point. Religions are complex phenomenon in which social and political battles are fought out. In oppressed communities

they can provide social cohesion, identity and a focus for resistance like the black Christian churches in the USA and in South Africa during Apartheid.

Indiscriminate attacks on Islam can only help reactionary political forces within Muslim communities and undermine progressive and liberal voices. We have common cause with the people of the Banlieues in opposing exploitation and racism. Working-class unity will not be promoted by fomenting religious division.

FOOTNOTES

1. Stop the Support for Islamic State Terror – Alex Davidson *The Socialist Correspondent* Issue Number 21.

2. Briefing Terror and Islam – *The Economist* 17th January 2015.

Britain should stop interfering in Syria

Continued from page 17

While Syria has only small resources of oil, at the time of writing in terrorist hands and being destructively bombed by the United States, the country has large reserves of natural gas.

In addition several pipelines or potential pipelines cross her territory. This fact, along with her spirit of independence and her friendship with Russia and Iran, can be seen as a major reason why Syria's population has, since 2011, been subjected to a brutal war which has cost the lives of, variously estimated, 100,000 to 200,000 people, and has forced millions to leave their homes and seek refuge in neighbouring countries or inside Syria, in parts of the country still under government control.

The Kirkuk-Baniyas oil pipeline - from Kirkuk oilfield in Iraq to the Syrian port of Baniyas - which was opened on 23 April 1952, has been out of operation since 2003, when it was damaged by US air strikes.

In September 2010 Iraq and Syria agreed to build two new replacement pipelines, but this has not happened yet as both countries are embroiled in war.

The current pipeline dispute, however, concerns the transportation of natural gas. The South Pars/North Dome gas field is the world's largest known gas reservoir, in the middle of the Persian Gulf, straddling the territorial waters of Qatar and Iran.

A natural gas pipeline has been proposed from Qatar to Turkey and hence



Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad. With Assad out of the way, Qatar could proceed with its natural gas pipeline through Syria to Turkey.

to other parts of Europe, with one possible route being through Syria. Syria rejected this proposal in 2009.

It has been suggested that Qatar's involvement in the war in Syria was based on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's refusal. With this pipeline Qatar could by-

pass rival Saudi Arabia - pipelines are already in place in Turkey to receive the gas. With Assad out of the way, and a Qatar-friendly government installed, the plan could go ahead.

The proposed alternative to this pipeline is the Iran-Iraq-Syria Friendship Pipeline, a natural gas pipeline running from the South Pars / North Dome gas field towards Europe via Iran, Syria and Lebanon to supply Europe, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

In July 2011 Iran, Iraq and Syria said they planned to sign a contract to construct the pipeline, with a refinery and related infrastructure in Damascus, the Syrian capital. A framework agreement was to be signed in early 2013.

The battle for control of the world's energy resources is therefore a very plausible reason for the war in Syria. Certainly the 'defence of democracy' argument fell when Syria drew up a new constitution in 2012, and when, in June 2014, Bashar al-Assad won the presidency with 88.7% of the vote on a 73.42% turnout.

As the *Guardian* said at the time: 'After the results were released, Damascus erupted into a thunderous rolling clap of celebratory gunfire ... On the streets of the capital, men cheered and whistled ...'

It is our responsibility in Britain to continue to tell the British government to keep out of Syria. If other countries had not interfered, the war in Syria would have been won by the government forces long ago, and the people would be rebuilding their destroyed country.

Saudi Arabia: USA's & UK's reliable ally

In 1945, on his way back from the Yalta Conference (pictured below), American President, Roosevelt met the king of Saudi Arabia on an American warship in the Red Sea.

By **PAT TURNBULL**

During this meeting Roosevelt obtained a concession of 1.5 million square kilometres for the consortium of American oil companies operating in Saudi Arabia.

From then on, Saudi Arabia has remained a reliable ally of the USA.

According to Ambrose Evans-Pritchard writing in the *Daily Telegraph* on 23 October 2014, Saudi Arabia also played a major role in the destruction of the Soviet Union.

According to Evans-Pritchard, 'Russia's ex-premier Yegor Gaidar dated the turning point to September 1985 when Saudi Arabia stopped trying to defend the crude market, cranking-up output instead. "The Soviet Union lost twenty billion dollars per year, without which the country simply could not survive," he wrote.'

Evans-Pritchard continued, 'the Soviet economy had run out of cash for

food imports ... its leaders had to beg for "political credits" from the West ...'

Saudi Arabia, a country with a tiny population and huge oil wealth, can afford to tinker with the oil markets.

Evans-Pritchard again, 'Reagan (pictured below) biographer, Paul Kengor says the chief motive was to nurture their alliance with Washington, a claim endorsed by Michael Reagan [son of Ronald]. "My father got the Saudis to flood the market with cheap oil," he said. By then President Reagan was spending 6.6% of GDP on defence ... inviting ruinous attempts by the USSR to keep up.

"The "Reagan Doctrine" twisted the knife further by backing guerrilla revolts against Soviet client states; in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Angola, among others. The Pentagon's rule of thumb was that it cost Moscow ten times as much to defend these regimes

as it cost Washington to take pot shots ...

'The Saudis were again helpful. They bankrolled the Nicaraguan Contras when House Democrats cut off funding, quietly paying for an off-the-books operation by US intelligence. The go-between was Prince Bandar bin Sultan (pictured below), then Saudi ambassador in Washington.

'This is the same Prince Bandar - later head of Saudi secret services - who spent four hours with Mr Putin last year at his dacha outside Moscow. A transcript of their talk was leaked by the Kremlin, to embarrass Riyadh.

'It suggests that the prince offered Russia a deal to carve up global oil markets but only if it sacrificed Syria's Assad regime. He purported to speak with the backing of Washington ...

'No wonder they think the worst in Moscow today as the Saudis cheerfully shrug off a 24% plunge in Brent crude prices since June. "This is political manipulation," said Mikhail Leontyev from Russia's oil arm Rosneft ...'

In his 1988 book *Fragmentation of the Middle East* Georges Corm has this to



Yalta, Crimea, February 1945: The WWII Allies' - Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin - discuss plans to occupy Nazi Germany and the future of postwar Europe.



Ronald Reagan



Bandar bin Sultan

say: '... the Saudis generously financed fundamentalist religious movements, ... mosques, ... charitable organisations, newspapers ..., schools or community clinics ...

'The revival of Islam in Eastern countries ... is ... in many respects, a Western product, for the kingdom's oil wealth was really made possible entirely by the United States.'

After tireless efforts Cuban 5 are free

The report of the International Commission on the Cuban 5 in the last issue of the *Socialist Correspondent* outlined the grave miscarriages of justice perpetrated against them, so it was incredibly moving to see the remaining three of the 5 freed and reunited in their homeland with their families.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

After sixteen years in prison for combating terrorism, Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labanino and Antonio Guerrero returned to Cuba in December last year welcomed officially as heroes and with warmth from neighbours, friends and ordinary Cubans.

The media have reported on the deal

created remittances of money from individuals in the US to people on the island. Importantly he announced the intention to establish diplomatic relations with Cuba.

However significant challenges remain to complete normalisation. The right won victories in recent elections in the

edging that existing US policy on Cuba “failed to advance our interests”.

Cuba’s future direction, however, is in the hands of its government and people, which they will better be able to determine without US interference of any kind.

In a move which demonstrates that this is a change of tactics rather than a change of heart only a week after Obama announced the steps towards resuming diplomatic relations, the State Department said that it was making \$11m available to US or foreign based bodies to boost “civil, political and labour rights” in Cuba.

At the same time as all this was happening Obama signed into law measures which will allow the US to impose sanctions on Venezuelan officials and which will increase funding to undermine democracy. Recently US pressure on Venezuela has been ramped up significantly in what has been described as a “slow coup”.

Whilst welcoming the steps taken by Obama, Cuban leaders, notably President Raul Castro and former President Fidel, have sounded notes of caution as well as pressing the US to go further.

Rather than allow the US to seize the initiative, making further improvement in relations conditional on rolling back socialism, Cuba has instead posed its own sets of demands. It is seeking the return of the US base at Guantánamo Bay, the removal of Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, an end to US funding and support aimed at regime change in Cuba and, of course, the end of the Blockade along with compensation for the suffering and economic damage that it has caused over the last 54 years.

President Raul Castro said, “The re-establishment of diplomatic relations is the start of a process of normalising bilateral relations, but this will not be possible while the blockade still exists, while they don’t give back the territory illegally occupied by the Guantánamo naval base.”

The freeing of the remainder of the 5 and moves to establish diplomatic relations reminds us that campaigning achieves results, which is useful as much still needs to be done.



which freed them and the moves by the USA to normalise relations with Cuba as a matter of power politics.

However, without the tireless efforts of campaigners for the 5 and against the blockade these steps would not have happened. Maintaining the profile of the imprisoned anti-terrorist agents meant that the US Government could not ignore them.

In the end it became necessary for Obama to release them as a first step to effecting change. As a White House press release acknowledged: “Long standing US policy towards Cuba has isolated the United States from regional and international partners.” (And, it could be added, from world opinion.)

Obama also used his executive powers to allow more travel to Cuba and in-

US and Obama has no majority in Congress, which means that it could block the appointment of an ambassador to Cuba.

The blockade remains in place in the form of the Helms-Burton Law and the Torricelli Act whose repeal would also require the agreement of Congress.

Though opinion is shifting in Miami towards wanting more engagement with Cuba, there is unlikely to be any significant change among right-wing legislators unless Cuba accedes to their demands to roll back the gains of the revolution.

Of course Obama and others believe that their strategy will be more successful in hastening that day than the isolationist policies of the far right.

Indeed he has said as much, acknowl-

What makes Robert Burns immortal?

The Socialist Correspondent Burns Supper,
Glasgow - 7 February 2015 - Toast to the
Immortal Memory of Robert Burns

By **CHRIS BARTTER**



To see how things are shar'd;
How best o' chieles are whiles in want,
While coofs on countless thousands
rant,
And ken na how to wair't;
Robert Burns
Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet.

An Immortal Memory? That's some claim, isn't it? Particularly for a 37 year-old failed farmer and exciseman. But it is said that only the good die young.

Or should the saying be reversed – only those who die young are good? For they don't have the opportunity to renege on their youthful idealism, or for their early promise to be unfulfilled.

However, Burns has had a huge impact on the literary, political, and musical world – not just in Scotland – but across the globe. In some circles that would be enough to consider his memory immortal, but you're not going to get away as easily as that!

Following the eloquent contribution of last year's speaker, David Kenvyn, I am pleased to still be able to add the views of a fellow countryman after the febrile debate of the last two years – and hopefully I will not be considered as a 'settler' or even worse a 'colonist'.

Invention of Necessity?

Of course we are all products of our background – and to deny one's upbringing seems to me to be not only a futile exercise but also a self-damaging one.

In these days of avatars and false identities it may be sometimes tempting like Jeffrey Archer to invent a beneficial back story, but, I suggest, would probably have as much long term success to one's reputation as his had!

Of course literature has more than its fair share of invention – indeed it is an essential part of the genre – and I'll deal with that later.

One of the myths generally noised abroad – particularly current in Scotland for some reason – is that the English do not know about Burns. If that was once true – and I don't think it was, I remember learning Burns' songs at school, at least as much, and probably more

than I learnt Shakespeare's – it certainly has changed and continues to change. Due to the influence of Burns within politics – especially socialist politics, the advocacy of expatriate Scots and literary studies, a basic knowledge of Burns' life and works in England is – I would suggest – at least equivalent to that of Shakespeare – certainly outwith the academic industry that surrounds Shakespeare.

It is, of course, a false comparison on merit, in any case. A comparison between a sixteenth century dramatist and poet and an eighteenth century poet and songwriter is probably as valuable as comparing, say, Oscar Wilde and Adrian Mitchell. But there are now many Burns studies, Burns suppers, Burns admirers and even Burns marketing opportunities – there is even a specially brewed Burns Ale that is made by Shepherd Neame, brewers from Faversham in Kent!

Who was Burns?

So who was Robert Burns? And what makes his legacy immortal? A poet, songwriter and a young man who had an impact both during his short life, and subsequently.

He was no 'heaven-taught ploughman' – in fact he was taught by both his own father, and by university graduate, John Murdoch. His parents attached great importance to their sons' education.

However he was no stranger to following the plough and was born and brought up in poverty. Circumstances which had a significant impact on his life, both in his search for a career that gave him the financial stability to write, and in the empathy he always had with his fellow workers.

**It's hardly in a body's pow'r
To keep, at times, frae being sour,**

The 'heaven-taught ploughman' myth, of course is one that was invented by the Edinburgh literary (and indeed political) establishment of the time. Invented so they could create a Scottish Bard who was acceptable to them.

Burns, of course went along with this myth in public, creating almost a dual personality, while he was in Edinburgh anyway.

Not that this kind of duality is unusual in the literary and artistic world. One of Burns' main influences, James MacPherson purported to act as an amanuensis for the Gaelic Bard 'Ossian' of whom there is no evidence for his existence.

And one can give other examples of the creation of characters, and names to cloak actors, writers and musicians throughout history – from Acton, Currier and Ellis Bell, Mary Ann Evans, Eric Arthur Blair, through to Jimmy Miller and Richard Starkey. (A special prize for anyone who gets all of the better known names for these!)

International impact

Burns was and is hugely important in the international literary cannon, influencing, apart from Scottish writers as diverse as Scott and MacDiarmid, writers the world over. American poet John Greenleaf Whittier was reputed to carry a book of Burns in his pocket and wrote these lines about Burns' verses.

**No more these simple flowers belong
To Scottish maid and lover;
Sown in the common soil of song,
They bloom the wide world over.**
John Greenleaf Whittier:
*On Receiving a Sprig of Heather
in Blossom*

This particular reference to song is one I intend to return to.

His influence continued in the US –

John Steinbeck quotes him in the title of his book *Of Mice and Men* and JD Salinger deliberately makes Holden Caulfield misquote Burns in *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Burns' impact is also particularly strong in Russia and especially the Soviet Union, where he was dubbed the 'People's Poet' and where the first ever Burns commemorative stamp was issued in 1956 - the 160th Anniversary of his death.

A Russian translation of his work by Samuel Marshak sold over 600,000 copies. And who of that generation will forget the astounding Scotland/GDR Friendship Society Burns Suppers, organized by the late Peter Smith!

Even in China Burns was celebrated. Apparently the marching song of the Chinese resistance in World War II was a translation of *My Heart's in the Highlands*.

**Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North,
The birth-place of Valour, the country of Worth;
Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,
The hills of the Highlands for ever I love.**

Robert Burns:
My Heart's in the Highlands

You can hear the Chinese Resistance in these lines, can't you!

Interestingly this was also an indication that Burns was quite prepared to write in standard English as well as Scots, when he thought the need arose.

The struggle against oppression

Possibly as pertinent, although less politically charged, is Burns' influence on English writers. He is a main (if not the main) forerunner of the romantic movement - Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, all acknowledged their debt to Burns.

Well I said 'less politically charged', but maybe that isn't so true. Both Wordsworth, and his contemporary Southey, were strong early supporters of the French Revolution as was Burns.

**When Brunswick's great Prince cam a
cruisin' to France,
Republican billies to cove,
Bauld Brunswick's great Prince wad
hae shawn better sense,
At hame wi his Princess to mowe.**

Robert Burns:
When Princes and Prelates

And if anyone is wondering over a translation of the word 'mowe' in the above quote, let us just say, that it is taken from the *Merry Muses of Caledonia* - the verses of Burns that polite society tend to gloss over!

Of course both Southey and Wordsworth changed their views latterly - Southey dramatically so. No-one can of course say what Burns' subsequent view of the French Revolution was, as he died in 1796, after the period known as The Terror, but before Napoleon had proclaimed himself Emperor. One might as well claim to know how he would have voted in the recent referendum!

Personally I'm with the 20th Century Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai, who when asked what he thought about the French Revolution is reputed to have replied "It's too early to say."!

But support for uprising and ordinary working people is a clear Burns' trait. His political writings show his sympathies with people struggling against oppression - the French revolution, the American War of independence, and here, from *The Slave's Lament*.

**It was in sweet Senegal that my foes
did me enthrall,
For the lands of Virginia, - ginia, O:
Torn from that lovely shore, and
must never see it more;
And alas! I am weary, weary O:**
Robert Burns:
The Slave's Lament

Indeed Abraham Lincoln himself was a big Burns fan - apparently memorising much of Burns by heart. Of course Lincoln was a friend of the Scottish Presbyterian minister, James Smith - who he



William Wordsworth



Samuel Taylor Coleridge



Percy Bysshe Shelley

appointed consul to Scotland and who is buried in the Calton Burial Ground in Glasgow.

Music opens doors

Burns' influence on the development of music, and on many later musicians too, are many and varied.

Bob Dylan has cited *'My love is like a*

red, red rose' as the lyric that had the biggest effect on his life. A majority of folk-based musicians acknowledge their debt to him. One of them, Dick Gaughan, along with Dave Swarbrick and a Canadian band formed by Jason Wilson, have been exploring Scottish and Jamaican musical links recently.

There is some fertile ground to be covered here, as the Scottish links to Jamaica are considerable, and, of course, almost included Burns himself at one point, though I'm far from sure that just adding *No Woman, No Cry*, to the end of *A Red Red Rose* is particularly successful.

Auld Lang Syne is recognized by the Guinness Book of Records as one of the three most popular songs in the English language - somewhat ironically!

Indeed a copy of the manuscript version of *Auld Lang Syne* was commemorated on a £2 coin. The manuscript, I'm glad to say, currently resides in the Mitchell Library in the foremost collection of Burns related material in the world. It resides there due to the work of my partner, Doreen Kean. It was Doreen's work in pulling together the finances that allowed the city to purchase the MS from Christie's in New York.

The immortal threads

So, what ARE the things that make Burns' memory immortal?

There are three clear threads that run through Burns' work that I think ensure his immortality - threads that are linked but separate.

Firstly, his ability to use specific personal images to allow us to visualize the scene, but more than this - to use an individual event or scene to shine a light onto general and universal truths. This needs the talent to both visualize the scene in a way people can relate to - the first lines from *Tam O'Shanter* for example.

**When chapmen billies
leave the street,
And drouthy neighbors, neighbors meet,**

Immediately that shows me a scene at the end of the working day where people are on the lookout for a drink after work - something that I'm sure we've all experienced!

And it also needs the talent to relate these events to general principles - later in *Tam O'Shanter* for example Burns has the "glorious" Tam

O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

Haven't we all put the world to rights over a drink? As a former colleague of mine once said: 'The difference between us and Marx, is that Marx remembered to write it down!'

This use of the everyday to throw light on general principles is a major part of Burns' genius - *To a Louse* - for example where the sight of a louse on a lady's bonnet in church takes us via concern, outrage and humour to the realization that she is about to fall foul of the gossip and fingerpointing that he himself has had to suffer

**Thae winks an' finger-ends, I dread,
Are notice takin'.**

And finally it ends in the general truth,

**O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursel as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion:**

Now Westlin' Winds as well, where a fairly standard romantic nature ballad suddenly leads to a condemnation of man's attack on nature

**Avaunt, away, the cruel sway
Tyrannic man's dominion
The sportsman's joy, the murdering cry
The fluttering, gory pinion**

This universality is something that has separated the genius from the good throughout literature. Recently we have had to put up with a good deal of non-sense talked about the Great War.

But if we go back to the poets who wrote about it at the time - the First World War poets - we can see clearly that those that were able to 'universalise the suffering' about them - to broaden their vision like Wilfred Owen, ultimately made more long term impact with their verse than did the impressively sharp personal barbs of Siegfried Sassoon.

Perhaps we should draw a veil over Jeffrey Archer's favourite First World War poet, Rupert Brooke. But can I briefly put in a plea for a Scottish poet who seems to me unfairly ignored - Charles Hamilton Sorley may have died very early in the war, but his poems do seem to me to have that broad universal vision.

Secondly, this ability mostly comes from writers who are close to, or based

in, a community. Writers who have an empathy and understanding of the motivations of ordinary people are able to universalize the personal, far better than those who are brought up to look at life as something that is purely something for their personal exploitation and their individual pleasure.

This is obviously a strength of Burns. He wasn't keen on the Edinburgh establishment, and his poems and songs based in his local communities have a life and reality about them. I've already mentioned *Tam O'Shanter*, here's the opening of *The Cotter's Saturday Night*:

**The toil-worn Cotter frae his labor goes,
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.**

Thirdly, artists who use and understand music - especially but not only - folk music, are also more likely to have this talent. Music and song is a superb way to identify a concern, clarify an issue, to open doors.

Folk songs - and that's what much of Burns' songs are - deal with the lives of ordinary working people, their trials and struggles, and also gives a voice to those people.

Music and song too, are important for their ability to spread words and ideas into different environments - as Whittier had it

**Sown in the common soil of song,
They bloom the wide world over.**

Burns was, in my view, as important for his songs as for his poems - possibly more so.

He spent much of his short life working to collect lyrics and tunes, to write, and write down, traditional songs he heard at home and on his travels.

He was involved with two collections of Scottish songs, and by far the most important is Johnson's Scottish Musical Museum.

Burns came across James Johnson, and his massive project, when he visited Edinburgh for the first time in 1786.

He was immediately fascinated with the idea, and began to collect and seek out local people's songs eventually contributing around 200 songs in total, about a third of the whole work.

Obviously this kind of work predated but was followed up by the kind of work that Cecil Sharp, Frank Kidson, AL Lloyd and of course Hamish Henderson did much later.

In reality, however, Burns is probably closest to another songwriter and collector - Ewan MacColl - as he often rewrote old songs and introduced new songs to old tunes.

Amongst the songs he added to The Musical Museum were: *Auld Lang Syne*, *My love is like a Red, Red Rose*, *The Battle of Sherramuir*, *Scots Wha Hae*, *Green Grow the Rushes*, *O, Flow Gently Sweet Afton*, *Ye Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon*, *Ae Fond Kiss*, *The Winter it is Past*, *Comin' Thro the Rye* and *John Anderson, My Jo*. And many more.

So then - what is Burns' legacy? Is it immortal?

I refer those of you still listening back to Zhou Enlai! But what we can clearly see is that Burns' work contains the key factors to maintain its own, and his immortality.

The immortality that Burns has rests in his work. He could pick up and describe the lives of ordinary people. He could relate those incidents to the great principles of life. He could (and did) stand on their side, speak up for their struggles, and call for a better world. (Incidentally, not a bad philosophy for a political party!).

Those talents and his use of song and lyrics mean that his verse has been accessible to other talents - both literary and musical.

Especially musical - for 'the soil of song' is the key factor that has meant Burns' work has 'bloomed the whole world over' - surely the definition of an Immortal Memory. Then raise your glasses and drink a toast to Robert Burns - his immortal memory.



Mimicking the SNP is not the answer

THE STRANGE DEATH OF LABOUR SCOTLAND

By Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw

Published by Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Review by PAUL SUTTON

On 13 December 2014 Jim Murphy was elected as the seventh leader of the Scottish Labour Party in sixteen years.

Three months earlier a majority of voters in what traditionally were Labour strongholds in Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire had voted 'Yes' in the independence referendum, putting a major question mark over whether they would vote Labour in the May 2015 General Elections.

These two events underline what has been seen as a significant decline in the fortunes of the Scottish Labour Party, demonstrating weaknesses in leadership and the haemorrhaging of support in its West of Scotland heartlands.

The *Strange Death of Labour Scotland* provides to date the single most comprehensive study of the Labour Party in Scotland over the last thirty years.

It describes in detail the policies and operating procedures of the Scottish Labour Party and sets out the reasons for its decline. It is a compelling and insightful narrative and provides a valuable launch point to assess the future of the Labour Party in Scotland.

The key themes are clearly set out in the opening and closing pages of the book. The authors state that 'Labour Scotland', with its myths of greater egalitarianism and shared values, as symbolised for example in 'Red Clydeside', along with the institutional basis to support it, as evidenced by the previous high levels of council housing and trade union membership, along with the hegemony of the Labour Party in local government, has "passed into history, leaving the Labour Party with a shortage of ideas and resources and little sense of what else to do" (p.3).

Accordingly they argue it needs to find "a sense of mission and purpose" (p.329) and it needs to do this by being more aware of 'territorial politics' which requires a greater emphasis on its "Scot-

tish credentials" (p.330). In short, the Scottish Labour Party needs to reinvent itself as 'Scottish Labour' in a new and different sense than the Scottish Labour Party of old whose policies and practices are no longer relevant to the needs of the new Scotland.

This, of course, is a plea for fundamental modernisation in Scotland and as such fits in with the vision for Scotland proposed by Jim Murphy - a strong supporter of New Labour - which envisages organisational change in the Labour Party in Scotland and new policies emphasising the independence from London of Scottish Labour, among much else.

However, what emerges from the analysis of Hassan and Shaw is something more robust than a simple rehash of New Labour north of the border. In particular they want something more identifiably Scottish as well as something more attuned to modern Scotland.

These conclusions surface regularly throughout the book. They are to be found in the majority of the chapters. They also emerge in many of the themes. Three in particular are significant given the tasks now facing the Scottish Labour Party.

These are the Blairite modernisation programme and its impact and resonance in Scotland, the impetus to devolution, and the emergence of the Scottish National Party (SNP) as a rival self-proclaimed 'social democratic' party. Together they cast light on what sort of strategy the Scottish Labour Party should adopt to once again become predominant.

New Labour and Scotland

The Scottish Labour Party was at the height of its powers electorally in the 1966 General Election when it won 49.1% of the vote (note however that the Conservatives won 50.1% of the

vote in 1955, the only time in Scotland that a political party has won the majority of the vote).

Thereafter Labour remained comfortably dominant normally winning over 40% of the vote and returning by far the largest number of MPs, helped by the first-past-the post voting system which gave it a substantial advantage.

The support for the Conservative Party steadily declined and that for the SNP generally rose but neither - except for the SNP in October 1974 - presented a serious challenge, as neither did the newly formed Social Democratic Labour Party. There was therefore no pressing need for fundamental change in policy or direction in the Labour heartlands of Scotland, even when directly confronted by the Thatcher governments of the 1980s. The modernisation programme of New Labour under Tony Blair was therefore viewed with some suspicion in many parts of Labour Scotland.

The 'traditional' Labour Party agenda, represented in the views of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee (Scotland) enjoyed more support than in England, and Blair was forced to set up the Network, in which Jim Murphy was particularly active, to win the support of the Scottish Executive Committee (SEC) and others to his programmes of change.

Blair won, with seven out of eight left-wingers losing their places on the SEC in March 1997 and the SEC restructured to reduce the role of the trade unions and constituency organisations and increase that for elected representatives at all levels of government.

Soon after "the Network was dissolved" (p.252) but the changes introduced did not promote a transformation of the values or practices of much of the Labour Party in Scotland and the influence of New Labour remained confined to largely south of the border.

These conclusions are clearly brought out in the book in the chapters discussing 'Scottish Labour in Power' which consider policies on education and health. Both of these are sectors wholly devolved to the Scottish Gov-

ernment in Holyrood and therefore 'independent' to some degree of the influence of London.

The key propositions are that policy making in these sectors in Scotland was more open to influence from professional inputs from the professional organisations in medicine and teaching, including the trade unions, and more 'collectivist' in values (what they term "social democratic communitarianism" p. 183) than in England.

Market oriented strategies in education and health were rejected in Scotland along with league tables and some of the other paraphernalia of New Labour public sector reform.

Indeed, policies could be implemented in direct opposition to the Blair government. They instance the introduction of free personal care in Scotland on the initiative of First Minister, Henry McLeish, as a case in point.

However, in this case, as they also note, it was in opposition to the majority of his ministers in the Scottish government and to many Labour Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) as well. McLeish prevailed because of public support for the proposal.

This suggests a caveat is needed as to how far Scottish Labour was insulated from New Labour and how far policy making might be distinctive. At a later point they note that Scottish Labour ministers were enthusiastic advocates, against vociferous opposition from the trade unions, of private finance initiatives (PFI) in Scotland and supported Glasgow Council's school-building programme which was "the biggest PFI project in the UK" (p.271). The PFI initiatives were endorsed by the Scottish Labour Party conference in 2002.

The picture is therefore not straightforward and their claim that "New Labour-style modernisation would not cross the border into Scotland" (p.154) is in part contradicted by the evidence. Nevertheless they do make a plausible case that the influence of New Labour was significantly constrained within Scotland.

The reasons they adduce for this relate mainly to what they believe are distinctive political values. They argue that contrary to "social surveys that consistently show that, in terms of their broad socio-economic and political attitudes ... people in Scotland are not markedly more social democratic than people in other parts of the UK" (p.177) their case studies show that "the public sector discourse among the professional middle classes in Scotland articulates a distinctively more collectivist ethos than in England" (their emphasis)(p.178).

On this basis they are able to conclude that "there are indeed disparities between the two nation states" (p.178).

The answer to this must be 'yes' and 'no'. Case studies by definition give only part of the picture and their conclusions emphasise the distinctive values of only a segment of the middle classes and cannot stand as representative of that class as a whole let alone the working class.

At the same time there is something different in the way that health and education was configured in Scotland and these areas remain subject in Scotland to wholly Scottish direction. How much this means that policy can be fundamentally different from the rest of the UK however is open to question and how much it applies to policy in other sectors where the influence of Westminster is still paramount remains even more uncertain.

The Scottish Labour Party and Devolution

The Scottish Labour Party supported Home Rule from its inception until 1958 when it was abandoned at a special Scottish Labour Party conference. Thereafter it attracted little interest until the successes of the SNP in the general election of 1974 forced a rethink.

The leadership of the Labour Party eventually settled on a referendum on devolution to decide the issue, even though this was opposed by many in the Scottish party "including a significant part of its local government base who feared displacement by any Scottish Assembly" (p.247).

The referendum vote held on 1 March 1979 saw the proposal for a Scottish Assembly supported by 52% of voters but was not carried due to the requirement that 40% of the eligible electorate needed to vote 'yes' (as a proportion of the total electorate the final figure was 33%).

Shortly after the Labour government was defeated 311-310 by a vote of no confidence in Westminster first tabled by the SNP and supported by them and the Tories and others. On 3 May Thatcher won the ensuing general election.

Given this bruising experience the Scottish Labour Party was slow to take up the devolution issue again and when it did so many within it - never quite a majority but on some issues and votes close to it - were opposed to the idea and/or to a further referendum.

Nevertheless, the narrative, as set out in detail by Hassan and Shaw, shows a growing commitment to devolution in the early 1990s which was finally put into action with the holding of a referendum on devolution on 11 September

1997 following the election of the Blair government in May.

On this occasion a Scottish Parliament was approved by 74% of those voting, with 63.5% voting for it to have tax raising powers. A polling survey undertaken the previous day suggested that 85% of Labour supporters were intending to vote 'yes' (p.85) and the campaign for a 'yes' vote was supported by all Scottish Constituency Labour Party branches in contrast to 1979 where one-third of them decided not to campaign at all (p.85).

The first Scottish Parliament elections were held on 6 May 1999. Labour won 38.8% of the constituency vote and 33.6% of the regional vote, the SNP 28.7% and 27.3% respectively ⁽⁴⁾. The Scottish Labour Party entered into a coalition with the Liberal Democrats to form the first Scottish government.

The format was repeated with the second set of Scottish parliamentary elections in 2003. On this occasion Labour won 34.6% of the constituency vote and 29.3% of the regional vote; the SNP were 23.9% and 20.9%.

The commentary by Hassan and Shaw on Labour in government in Holyrood from 1999-2007 suggests it was both unexceptional and uninspiring. The Labour MSPs were accused of acting as local councillors and the level of political discussion among them was seen as low (p.99).

Its longest serving leader, Jack McConnell, is identified as wanting to prioritise government not politics (p.110) and not wanting to confront Westminster in any way, entering into a collaborative arrangement with the Blair government in which the latter exercised little political oversight (pp.303-4) but in which McConnell did little in return to embarrass them.

In the Scottish parliamentary elections of 2007 Labour lost to the SNP. The latter won 32.9% of the constituency vote and 31% of the regional vote compared to 32.2% and 29.2% for Labour (141,891 votes which might have delivered a Labour victory were rejected and not subsequently investigated). The SNP won 47 seats to 46 for Labour and established a minority government.

The response of the Scottish Labour Party was to play the independence card. In May 2008 Wendy Alexander, the new Scottish Labour leader, indicated her support for a Scottish independence referendum as proposed by the SNP without consulting the Labour MSPs or their counterparts in Westminster in any meaningful way.

Not surprisingly, Hassan and Shaw claim she was immediately opposed by

many of them and by Gordon Brown leaving her “seriously discomfited, her authority badly eroded, and the issue of who had the strategic and political power to advance such a policy position left in total disarray” (p.309).

She soon resigned on another matter. But the confusion on competences/autonomy this created only began to move to resolution following the defeat of the Scottish Labour Party by the SNP in the 2011 Scottish parliamentary elections.

A working group was established shortly afterwards led by Jim Murphy and Sarah Boyack which reported in favour of fully devolving to the Scottish Labour Party all Scottish matters, including the rules for the Scottish leadership election, local government processes and selections, and Scottish Parliament selections.

These were approved and passed by the Labour Party in Britain and then Scotland in the autumn of 2011.

The decisions taken here shows a final acceptance by the Labour Party in Britain that the Scottish Labour party was a distinct entity. It did not however resolve all the issues between the two and it re-appeared again in the resignation of Johann Lamont as Scottish Labour Leader in October 2014 when she claimed that the Labour Party in London treated Scotland like a “branch office” (*BBC News Scotland*, 25 October 2014).

This underlines the many difficulties which have emerged over the years in coming to terms with the devolution process in the ‘two’ Labour parties which are obviously not applicable to a uniquely Scottish based singular party like the SNP. As such, structures and policies which mimic the SNP will not serve the Scottish Labour Party well.

The record also shows that on devolution the Scottish Labour Party was more likely to react to events rather than set the agenda. This was not always the case but it was so on so many occasions that on devolution its policy was largely one of pragmatic accommodation to what it needed to do to maintain its presence intact.

In the eyes of Hassan and Shaw this was one of the main reasons for its decline since it was short on vision and focused principally on maintaining and delivering its core vote and little else.

Scottish Labour and the SNP

There have been ten general elections since February 1974. The numbers voting SNP have varied from a high of 30.4% in October 1974 to a low of 11.75% in June 1983.

The figures in the last five elections

show a convergence to around 20% (19.9% of the vote in 2010)

The numbers voting Labour have by contrast been more consistent. The highest figure was 45.6% in June 1997 and the lowest 35.1% in 1983. The last five show a convergence to around 41% (42.0% of the vote in 2010). They demonstrate a level of support double that for the SNP.

On these figures alone Scottish Labour is well ahead of the SNP and under no real threat.

However, when the four elections for the Scottish Parliament are considered questions begin to emerge. These show the growth of a much more even contest.

In the 1999 and 2003 elections Labour was 10% ahead of the SNP on the constituency votes and 6% and then 10% ahead of the SNP on the regional votes. In the next two elections it fell behind.

In 2007 the SNP just beat Labour in the constituency and regional votes. In 2011 it triumphed over them winning 45.4% of the constituency vote and 44% of the regional vote compared to 31.7% and 26.3% respectively for Labour: “This was the highest ever vote in the SNP’s history, its biggest-ever lead over Labour, and Labour’s worst showing in the popular vote (excluding Euro elections) since 1918” (p.145).

The SNP won everywhere including Labour’s West of Scotland heartlands “which had proven mostly resolute in 2007” (p.146). Hassan and Shaw also point out that for “the first time since the 1930s Glasgow was no longer Labour, with the SNP finishing with 39.8% to Labour’s 35% on the regional vote, while winning five constituency seats to Labour’s four” (p.146).

Further figures show the breakdown of votes by social class. The AB and C1 social groups voted 41% SNP to 25% Labour and the 2CDE group 47% SNP to 28% Labour: “parts of the electorate which had previously been less SNP – women, working-class and Catholic voters – swung significantly to SNP” (p.147). In all, 21% of the Labour vote shifted to the SNP compared to 2007.

The 2007 election result was seen by some senior Scottish Labour figures as a ‘blip’. The 2011 result showed conclusively such a view was complacent.

While the poor performance of Scottish Labour in part reflected a very weak election campaign it actually exposed deeper problems of how to deal with the SNP as a whole.

Three issues in particular appear important.

The first loosely relates to ideology. In the 1980s the opposition to Thatcherism

in Scotland, and the consequent decline of Conservative support, allowed the SNP to steadily move leftward and adopt a ‘social democratic’ perspective. The policies adopted once they were in power from 2007 helped to consolidate their ‘left of centre’ credentials.

Against this the Scottish Labour Party had no real answer as its tradition of politics was highly empiricist, leaving it without any coherently thought out viewpoint. This left it ideologically weak to expose the pretensions and the practices of the SNP as a ‘social democratic’ party.

The second relates to political leadership. Hassan and Shaw argue that Alex Salmond was consistently seen as a more competent leader than those heading Scottish Labour. They cite opinion polls comparing Salmond to Donald Dewar in 1998 (p.90), Jack McConnell in 2007 (p.122) and Iain Gray in 2011 (p.147) in which Salmond consistently had better ratings.

He also had the advantage of length of term in office; both he and Nicola Sturgeon as SNP Deputy Leader were elected in 2004. The terms in office for Scottish Labour leaders were by comparison extremely short.

The third is the treatment of ‘the Scottish Dimension’. Here the SNP possess a distinctive advantage.

Hassan and Shaw cite Scottish Election Surveys from as early as 1974 that show them consistently more trusted to deal with Scotland than Scottish Labour.

As of 2011 they were seen as well ahead, both in terms of competence in government and standing up for Scottish interests. Scottish Labour did not take this on board – its manifesto for the 2011 Scottish parliamentary elections, for example, did not mention the SNP once, concentrating its fire on the Conservatives instead.

Hassan and Shaw conclude that Scottish Labour “have to recognise that they have been in recent years out-manoeuvred, out-positioned and out-resourced by the SNP, to an extent many would have thought unthinkable pre-devolution. The SNP have positioned themselves as a catch-all party with national appeal, leaving Scottish Labour as a party of declining Scotland” (p.220).

This judgement rings true and applies even more after the Scottish independence referendum. The question is whether it is simply confined to Scotland and to Scottish parliamentary elections or now applies to UK general elections as well.

The latest opinion polls indicate that the crossover has now taken place and that the two electoral contests - UK wide

and Scotland only – no longer relate to different dynamics. A poll by ICM reported in *The Guardian* at the end of last year sets the scene.

This projected the SNP winning 43% of the vote in the May 2015 general elections and 44% in the May 2016 Scottish parliamentary elections. These figures are close to the 45% constituency vote in the 2011 Scottish parliamentary elections and the 44.7% vote for independence.

Martin Boon of ICM commented: “Perhaps the most important finding in today’s poll is that the old distinction between the UK and Scottish elections has ceased to apply” (*The Guardian*, 26 December, 2014).

If this is the case Hassan and Shaw would not be surprised. They claim that differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK in terms of elections began to emerge in the 1960s and gathered strength during the Thatcher years providing a boost for Labour and spelling out decline for the Conservatives.

The general election of 2010 in Scotland “underlined Scottish politics’ very different dynamics” (p.141) with a significant increase in the Labour vote in Scotland compared to a fall in England and Wales.

The problem Scottish Labour faces is that an increase in vote in Scotland is now seemingly out of reach. Two polls ‘privately’ commissioned and funded by Lord Ashcroft, a former Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party, underline the problem.

The first, a poll of sixteen mostly Labour held seats in the West of Scotland and including all those in Glasgow, found the SNP ahead in fifteen of them.

In the Labour-held constituencies the swing to the SNP was 25.4%. One third

of those who voted Labour in the 2010 elections said they would definitely vote SNP in May 2015. The only safe seat for Labour was Glasgow North East while Douglas Alexander, Labour’s campaign manager and Shadow Foreign Secretary, would lose his Paisley and Renfrewshire South seat (Ashcroft, *The Scottish battleground*, 4 February 2015).

A further poll of another eight seats throughout Scotland released a month later confirmed the trend. Five were held by Labour and four were predicted to go to the SNP. They included Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, Labour’s safest seat in Scotland currently held by Gordon Brown with a majority of 23,000 (*BBC News Scotland*, 5 March, 2015).

Together these polls show the task facing Scottish Labour if it is to restore its electoral fortunes.

Whither Scottish Labour

The authors’ three themes point toward the need for Scottish Labour to take on a more visibly Scottish identity and to promote a more Scottish focused policy than it has done up to now.

At the same time a close reading suggests that while Scotland is different the degree to which it is so is open to question and difference does not necessarily preclude a close association with the rest of the UK.

The key questions to ask are ‘how much’ should Scottish Labour be different ‘and to what end?’ The two are closely inter-related.

If the main goal of Scottish Labour is to govern in the Scottish Parliament then its strategy is fairly simple. It must confront and defeat the SNP and to do so it must flaunt its Scottish credentials.

If however the main goal is to govern in the UK Parliament as well as in Holy-

rood it must take an approach which marries its Scottish vocation to an approach that consolidates the Union with the rest of the UK as well.

This is a more difficult task but not an impossible one. In this regard it can learn from the experience across the Atlantic – in Quebec in Canada.



In 1759 Britain defeated French forces in the French colony of Quebec and established British rule. In 1774 the specificities of Quebec were recognised in a special status for the French language and Catholic religion. In 1841 Quebec was joined with the rest of Canada and in 1867 Canada was given self-government under a federal constitution.

The special circumstances of Quebec re-emerged with the formation of the Parti Québécois (PQ) in 1968 with its policy of independence from Canada. It won the Quebec provincial elections in 1976 and in 1980 staged a referendum on independence in which it won 40% of the vote. In 1981 it was re-elected but in 1985 it was defeated by the Liberals who always had a strong presence in Quebec and in Canada as a whole, forming the federal government on numerous occasions.

In 1994 the PQ was again elected in Quebec and the following year staged a second referendum on independence. This saw 49.4% in favour of independence in a poll with a turnout of 94%. Thereafter its fortunes began to decline and while it was narrowly re-elected in 1998 it was defeated in 2003, with the Liberals again taking power.

In 2006 the Canadian Parliament recognised Quebec as a ‘nation’ within a ‘united Canada’. In 2012 the PQ won enough seats to form a minority government, but was defeated in 2014 winning only 25% of the vote and 30 seats, its worst performance in elections since 1970. This reflected increasing divisions and splits within it with defections to both the ‘left’ and the ‘right’ (2).

The analogy of Quebec should not be pushed too far but it shows that a separatist party with social democratic pretensions such as the PQ is not invincible





The Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood, Edinburgh, was opened in October 2004. The New Labour Government of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown (1997-2010) established the Parliament in 1999. New Labour dominated the Scottish Parliament until 2007 when the Scottish Nationalists gained supremacy.

even if it enjoys significant electoral support and has experience of provincial government.

Equally, in the fortunes of the Canadian Liberal Party it shows that a strong federal party with a long track record in and out of federal government (including at this level some significant set-backs) can win against a nationalist movement locally and form the government at provincial and federal level.

The Scottish Labour Party should reflect on such experiences. The best way for Scottish Labour to defeat the SNP is to contain it by promoting an altogether wider vision than the SNP can possibly articulate. This is the ground on which its differences with the SNP can be most easily demonstrated and Labour's strengths brought to bear.

It means that the Scottish Labour Party needs to take a broad brush approach. It will of course need to nurture its Scottish identity but it also has to assert the benefits of the Union.

The economic and social case for a continuing union with the rest of the UK has been put forward in *Socialist Correspondent* Issue 20 (Summer 2014). The release of the latest annual Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland 2013/14 report confirms the benefits.

This shows that while Scotland does pay £400 per head more in tax revenues than the rest of the UK it gets back £1200 more per head in public spend-

ing. It also shows a net fiscal deficit of 8.1% of GDP compared to a UK deficit of 5.6% GDP (*BBC News Scotland*, 11 March 2015). If Scotland was independent - or even fully fiscally autonomous as the SNP propose - it would need to find funds to cover this level of deficit and maintain this level of spending. That is £3.8 billion in higher taxes and/or public spending cuts i.e. equivalent to half the education budget or a third of the health budget.

These figures further need to be seen against a decline in oil and gas revenues. These fell from £6.2 billion in 2012/13 to £4 billion in 2013/14. That was before the halving of the oil price. Taking this into account the Institute of Fiscal Studies calculates revenues in 2014/15 as £1.8 billion.

The tax breaks announced by Osborne in the March 18th budget to bolster the oil industry in Scotland confirm that oil is less a bonus as the SNP claimed and potentially more a burden, especially once decommissioning the oil platforms begins in earnest.

Lastly, it should not be forgotten that the majority in Scotland support the Union as the 55% vote in the recent independence referendum clearly demonstrates.

In developing a new approach Scottish Labour needs to work closely with the Labour Party in the rest of the UK and vice versa. They both need to

change and to work out a new accommodation. In this there is mutual advantage to be gained.

This is the real 'Better Together' campaign. The sooner action is taken to implement it the more certain will be the success.

FOOTNOTES

1. Every person in Scotland has two votes for the Scottish Parliament in what is known as the Additional Member System (a form of proportional representation). One vote is for the local constituency within which the voter is registered and the other for the region. There are 73 constituencies and eight regions, each with seven votes (129 MSPs in total). The constituency MSP is elected by first-past-the-post method. The regional MSPs are elected according to a list of candidates prepared by the political parties. In each region parties are allocated seats depending on the number of seats they receive in the regional ballot, taking into account the number of constituency seats they win in each region. All MSPs have equal status in the Parliament.

2. The PQ began to be challenged from the left, including the trade unions, in the late 1990s when it implemented significant cuts in public sector employment to balance the budget. A new left-wing nationalist party was formed, Québec Solidaire.

True Garden Cities: the struggle goes on

LOVE, LIFE AND LIBERTY

A CD Celebrating the Radical Origins of Town and Country Planning. Costs £10 from the Town and Country Planning Association, 17 Carlton Terrace, London SW1Y 5AS. Telephone: 020 7930 8903; www.tcpa.org.uk

Review by PETER LATHAM

Garden Cities are in the news again, and the Chancellor, George Osborne, has declared that one will be built at Ebbsfleet in Kent. Yet the New Towns programme was scrapped by the Thatcher Government in the 1980s, so this is a new departure.

In recent years, the Town and Country Planning Association has been campaigning afresh for Garden Cities to help solve the housing crisis, and to invigorate the debate about the purpose of the planning system. With all-party support at Westminster, Garden Cities seem to be taking off.

Three years ago, the TCPA put together *“Love, Life and Liberty”* to inform and entertain about the struggle for land and freedom, and to help win hearts and minds for solutions. This lively performance in music, song, verse and prose sets out the background, stressing the original vision and social purpose not just of Garden Cities, but of the whole planning system brought in after 1945.

Dr Hugh Ellis, Head of Policy, tells the story, with readings by actors, poets and TCPA personalities, and songs and music by Chris Ellis (guitar) and Rosie Toll (fiddle).

And a radical message it is too, challenging private ownership of land and the private appropriation of the profits of development. There is a strong conviction of the power and justice of a community view, in preference to a property view.

The CD opens confidently with Leon Rosselson’s well-known song *“The World Turned Upside Down”*, about

the Diggers’ occupation of land in 1649 at St George’s Hill, Surrey, and their forcible ejection by the landlords.

“The earth was made to be a common livelihood to all,” affirms Gerrard Winstanley in the next piece, “your buying and selling of land, and the fruits of it one to another, is a cursed thing.”

After Peterloo in 1819, people suffered food shortages and falling wages, remembered in Shelley’s *“Song to the Men of England.”* The reformers’ cause was helped by lines like “The seed ye sow another reaps; the wealth ye find another keeps.”

Earlier, the Enclosure Acts had ensured the clearance of people from the

ments, but with limited success.

After their defeat in 1848, events took a different turn; the empire expanded and so did the industrial towns. Engels and Dickens described with revulsion the filthy conditions they saw themselves.

A series of readings from John Ruskin, William Morris and Edward Carpenter illustrate the growth of utopian solutions to these problems. Ruskin wanted “more houses in groups of limited extent ... walled round, with no festering suburb anywhere, but clean and busy street within, and open country without,” with access to fresh air, grass and the sight of a horizon.

Morris argued for every family to be generously lodged, a garden close to home for every child to play in, and for every house to ornament nature and not to disfigure it. Society would own the means of production.

Carpenter’s influential poem, *“Towards Democracy”* asserts that “nothing more is needed” than “the simple need and hunger of the human heart,” which might be “stronger than all combinations of Capital, wiser than all committees of representative Labour.”

A piece by Ebenezer Howard explains his idea of Garden Cities as a practical reform combining high quality design, local food production and co-operative ownership. He thought that skill, labour, energy and talent could divide the vested interests of land and capital, bringing together those who live by their work, urging the State to begin the reconstruction of society.

Where the State was slow to act, then voluntary collective effort could show the way.

But world war intervened. A fine rendering of Ed Pickford’s *“Workers’ Song”* hits home with its seminal lines about men being given a gun, pushed to the fore, and expected to die for the land of their birth “when we’ve never owned one handful of earth.”



John Ruskin



William Morris



Ebenezer Howard

commons. In *“Langley Bush,”* Chris Ellis movingly sings of the end of the “unbounded freedom of the wandering scene,” and the conversion to commercial agriculture and “the rage of blundering plough.” The lines are taken from two poems by John Clare, the farmers’ poet from Helpston who witnessed these changes first hand.

Later, some of the Chartists set up land companies to buy land by subscription and build co-operative settle-

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Sergeant Grischa: a WW1 corrective

THE CASE OF SERGEANT GRISCHA

By Arnold Zweig - 524 pages
Published by Prion Books Ltd.

Review by SIMON KORNER

At a time when the sea of poppies at the Tower of London served as a triumphant rehabilitation of the inter-imperialist bloodbath that was WW1, *The Case of Sergeant Grischa*, well-written in the realist tradition of Tolstoy, comes as a welcome corrective.

Arnold Zweig - not to be confused with the more famous Austrian writer Stefan Zweig - was a distinguished East German novelist born in 1887, loyal to the GDR until his death in 1968.

He won the Lenin Peace Prize in 1958 for his series of anti-war novels, of which *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* (1927) was the first to be published. This novel was a bestseller and translated into several languages. It was later burned by the Nazis.

Born in Prussian Silesia, the son of an orthodox Jewish tradesman, Zweig volunteered for the German army in WW1 and served in the department of military censorship. In response to an anti-semitic census of Jewish soldiers - designed to show that Jews were reluctant to join up - he turned against the war.

After the war he was an editor on the Zionist paper *Judische Rundschau* in Berlin. Forced to flee Germany in 1933, he stayed with friends, including Bertolt Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger and Anna Seghers, before emigrating to Palestine, where he ran a German-language newspaper in Haifa.

By 1948 he had become disillusioned with Zionism and returned to Germany - to the Soviet zone - at the invitation of the poet (later GDR Culture Minister) Johannes Becher.

For the rest of his life, Zweig was actively involved in the SED, a member of the Volkskammer and President of the German Academy of the Arts from 1950-53. A mini-series based on his novel was broadcast by East German television in 1970.

The plot of *The Case of Sergeant Grischa*, based on a true story, is straightforward.

In 1917 an ordinary Russian prisoner of war, Sergeant Grischa Paprotkin, escapes from a German PoW camp in eastern Europe.

Hoping to get home to his wife and newborn baby, he encounters a band of outlaws led by Babka, a tough, capable woman. The two become lovers, and she tries to help him by giving him the identity documents of her Russian ex-lover Bjuscheff, a deserter from the Tsarist army, so that if Grischa gets caught he won't be sent back to the PoW camp. However, when he is eventually captured, this ploy backfires: illiterate, Grischa hasn't read the notices calling on all Russian deserters to report to the German occupation forces or face execution as spies.

To evade the firing squad, Grischa reveals his real identity, corroborated by the authorities through his former PoW camp guards. But the supreme commander of the eastern front, Schieffenzahn, decides to have Grischa executed anyway "to maintain the prestige of our courts and in the interests of military discipline".

The rest of the novel traces the tussle between Schieffenzahn - based on the real-life rightwing general, Ludendorff - and the local general Lychow, in whose custody Grischa finds himself.

Lychow, an old-school Junker, known by his men as 'Daddy' Lychow, has taken a vague, patronizing liking to Sergeant Grischa: "A good fellow; reminded me of some one or other. If I'm not much mistaken, I've seen a face like

that on one of the orderlies."

Lychow feels honour-bound not to kill an innocent man. He has no problem with Schieffenzahn's initial order to shoot Russian deserters, which he regards as sensible because order must be maintained and Russian soldiers must not be allowed to infect his own troops with their "war-weariness, insubordination and sedition". But deliberately executing an innocent man offends his complacent belief in bourgeois justice.

Schieffenzahn, on the other hand, ruthless and unsentimental, embodies a coldly imperialist worldview, treating the fate of countries like Belgium dismissively ("Little peoples can have but little freedom") and aware of his own untrammelled power: "he had but to wink an eye and the Russian died or lived."

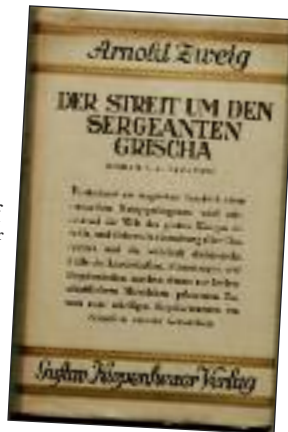
Yet Schieffenzahn is no pantomime villain. Not only is his decision to act outside the law explicable within the logic of imperial rule, but Zweig gives us a brief but telling psychological insight into Schieffenzahn's class resentment - a miller's son, bullied at his Prussian cadet school - which fuels his battle with the aristocrat Lychow.

Grischa's captors are likewise drawn in carefully differentiated ways, with a young idealistic lieutenant, Lychow's nephew Winfried, who tries to get Grischa released and - controversially for an officer - shakes the condemned man's hand just before the firing squad; and a Jewish lawyer Posnanski, helplessly trying to get Grischa off the hook by legalistic means.

The novel is full of other characters, all vividly evoked, such as Babka, the outlaw leader, whose entire family has been shot by the Germans.

Grischa himself is presented as a tough and capable soldier, able to withstand the harsh winter landscape into which he escapes and the torment of his extended wait on death row. His fluctuating moods in captivity, from exhilaration to drunken depression, are consistently believable.

These accurate portraits of high and lower-ranking officers, privates, outlaws, prisoners and local Jewish civilians combine to give a panoramic view of the



German military occupation of eastern Europe, given political context by the interjections of the omniscient narrative voice: “The Higher Powers looked on the whole land as ultimately under requisition. The only disturbing element was the population ...”

It’s a view informed by an awareness of class. The narrator tells us that everyone, officers and men, wants the war to end, but “the further one looked towards the west [ie away from the front]... the more sharply officers and men fell into two classes – Whites and Reds.”

The night of Grischa’s escape from his PoW camp, two German prison guards discuss the war. One of them hopes the enemy troops “all do as the Russkies, chuck down their rifles”, to which the other replies in a whisper: “Us first!”

Grischa himself regrets the trouble he might bring on the decent ordinary German soldiers who are his captors.

Moments like this – almost socialist realist – are mingled with satirical passages that recall the penetrating vision of artists such as Heartfield and Grosz. In a

drunken speech Grischa makes to his captors, he says: “There is so much forgiveness in the world ... Life’s so simple. I’ve found it all out. It’s not evil and wickedness that rule this world. It’s all bright and friendly, and war’s just a huge mistake”. Such naivety, when Grischa is facing his imminent execution at the hands of the German war machine, functions as bitter dramatic irony.

Elsewhere in a depiction of an incidental character, the narrative is barely able to contain its satirical anger: “a certain dapper little Lieutenant Hesse ran across to him, laid his hand on his shoulder, and hurriedly said that His Excellency wanted him... (Six months later Lieutenant Hesse’s arm was hanging in the fork of a beech tree, and his head rolled into a bramble-bush; though this can hardly have troubled him, as the handsome boy’s body was already pierced and torn in half-a-dozen places.)”.

Grischa is a classic Everyman figure, his story, though individual, representative of the millions of innocent victims

ground up in the war. His case works in part as a device, allowing Zweig to portray the complex web of empire, involving many different characters. It also serves to build up a sense of tragic inevitability, which tightens towards the climax - showing the novel’s origins in Zweig’s play, written some years earlier.

The vicissitudes of Grischa’s fate - escape, capture, sentence, reprieve, sentence again, execution - make for an agonising tale, whose seemingly endless twists and turns only emphasize the terrible rising tension.

Nobody wants Grischa to die, yet nobody can prevent it. When eventually Schieffenzahn rescinds the death sentence in an almost superstitious change of mind, it is too late. Snow has brought down the telegraph wires through which Grischa’s pardon would have reached the firing squad.

This novel – translated with excellent clarity and judgement by Eric Sutton – directs a powerful blow against the media glorification of WW1. It deserves to be far better known.

True Garden Cities: the struggle goes on

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Similarly, Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land” about the 1930s Depression is given fresh meaning because of the context, with new words about oakwood forests, western highlands, downs and lakeland waters.

In 1945 voters wanted change, refusing to be fobbed off with jam tomorrow.

JB Priestley’s wartime “Postscript” broadcasts helped shape the new mood. In a 1940 extract quoted he refers to a new network of voluntary associations created to help the war effort, which he calls “the organised militant citizen.”

Britain was losing its democratic values in the 1930’s, but was “being bombed and burnt into democracy.”

The postwar planning system in effect nationalised development land, until stopped in the 1950s. New towns and national parks added to progress in health, housing and nationalised industries, but not all the early visions were realised.

By the 1980s basic industries were being closed, a tragedy remembered in Bruce Springsteen’s “Ghost of Tom Joad,” bringing the tale near to the present day with its pessimism and despair.

Yet the performance ends on a positive note. In “Remembering the Future”

Kate Henderson and Hugh Ellis reject “personal running for cover” in favour of rediscovering “the art of thinking about our future, and understanding how it can be made better for ordinary people.”

To think and dream is to act. The last song by Si Kahn sums it up: “It’s not what you’re given, it’s what you do with what you’ve got.”

Some may wonder what Engels might have made of such utopia.

Whatever, the thinking is well ahead of most political parties, and welcome in any debate.

The struggle for true Garden Cities goes on.



JB Priestley



Frederick Engels



Woody Guthrie



Bruce Springsteen