

The Socialist Correspondent

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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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Bankruptcy of Capitalism

The absurdity of paying bankers huge bonuses, one year after the banking system had all but collapsed, is seen as absurd by everyone except the bankers. That is because they believe that finance capitalism is at the core of the whole system and so the system depends on them.

The argument is made that if bonuses are not paid then bankers will take their expertise to another bank; and to remain competitive banks have to pay the market price (ie the bonuses). In other words it is a feature of the system.

Thus bankers themselves make the best case for the bankruptcy of the capitalist system.

Quantitative Easing



Les Masters in his article "Quantitative Easing: printing money to throw at the bankers" explains how the current crisis is actually making money for the banks and the bankers. As Masters points out the government's preferred solution to the banking problem may encourage "the financial institutions to repeat many of the practices that triggered the previous crash."

Meanwhile there is much talk of the public debt and how we will all have to pay. That is, all but the bankers. As the bankers get their ludicrous bonuses more people join the dole queue. This is especially true of young people with some 18% of the 18-24 year age group now unemployed.

Les Masters also points out that we now have 1 million people working part-time (not through choice) the highest number since figures began to be recorded in 1992.

The figures showing the depth of the personal debt problem in "How ordinary citizens are drowning in

Commentary

debt" are a further indication of who is paying for the capitalist crisis.

James Thomson in his "UK elections are seriously out of favour" argues that the current situation does not lead to more people voting. On the contrary, given there is little to choose between the parties, more people will choose not to vote. The turnout at elections in 1950 and 1951 was 80%. It has declined to some 60% at the last two elections and may be even lower at the next General Election.

Generally speaking a low turnout favours the Tories and as we saw in the European elections when the Labour vote stays at home the BNP, without increasing their vote, can win seats.

The BNP now has access to the mass media. In a situation of rising unemployment, easy scapegoating and understandable cynicism about the main parties, organisations like the BNP may be the main beneficiaries.

Fascism

We have re-produced an article from the German journal, RotFuchs (Red Fox), on the development of German fascism in the 1930s. The article makes the case that German fascism did not start with the holocaust.

A very well-funded and unremitting campaign has sought to engender the belief that all victims of Nazism were Jews. In fact many trade unionists,



socialists and communists were early victims of German fascism.

The story of Albert Kuntz related here is one example of this grim history.

Israel is at the centre of perpetuating the myth that it was only Jews who were victims.

This Zionist propaganda is assisted by those right-wing commentators who are "holocaust deniers."

Israel

When Israel's foreign policy (like their criminal attack on Gaza one year ago) is criticised then the critics are labeled 'anti-Semitic'.

This has been the strategy of Israel's rulers and their allies for a long time. Labelling critics 'anti-Semitic' provides a smoke-screen for the barbaric acts committed by the Israeli state in its so-called defence.

Tom Berney in his article on Israel describes these attacks on Palestinians and exposes the contempt shown by the Israeli state for the international community. Until the USA (and Britain and the West more generally) withdraw support for Israel's aggressive and imperial aims then there will be no peace in the Middle East.

Robert Burns

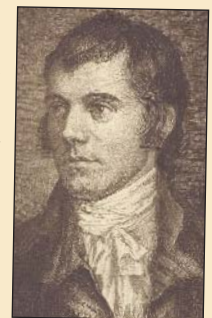
2009 was the 250th anniversary of the birth of the Scottish poet, Robert Burns. In this issue we have a special section devoted to Burns.

In January every year Burns Suppers are held throughout the world to celebrate the works of the poet. At these events it is traditional for a toast to be given to the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns.

This toast was given by Bill Sweeney at the Burns Supper hosted by the South African High Commission in South Africa House, London in 2008 and is reproduced here. In addition there are articles on the songs of Burns and the period during which he lived.

The American Revolution and War of Independence and the French Revolution happened during his lifetime and these momentous events helped to shape his view of the world as did his upbringing as the son of a poor tenant farmer.

Robert Burns' poems and songs have a universal and enduring appeal.



Quantitative easing: printing money to throw at the bankers

The site of Debden Security Printing Ltd. (owned by De La Rue plc.) in Loughton, Essex where the Bank of England gets its paper money printed. Coins are minted in Wales.



The Bank of England, among others globally, is practising what it calls “quantitative easing” to assist the capitalist economy out of its recent collapse.

LESLIE MASTERS explains why the Bank of England is printing money to deliberately stoke inflation.

“Quantitative easing” is one of those euphemisms that the ideologists of the bourgeoisie like to invent to hide their real intentions, such as “downsizing”.

What the Bank of England is hiding is the fact that it is trying to cause inflation – the *bête noire* of official capitalist thinking, and something the Bank usually professes to be fighting.

At the time of writing, the Bank of England’s “quantitative easing” programme has involved printing £200 billion in bank notes to buy assets from banks and other companies.

Printing large quantities of dollar bills by the Americans is what blew the Bretton Woods agreement out of the water, and led to the rampant inflation of the 1960s and ‘70s. Regardless of where or how the Sterling notes are spent, they will represent a vast increase in circulating medium over and above the amount required actually to circulate the goods and services available.

Since there will be, in effect, more money chasing the same goods and services, the prices of those goods and

services will be forced upwards.

For some, this may cause a transient increase in apparent profitability, leading them to attempt to expand production to exploit what appears to be an increase in demand for their products.

However, unlike genuine increases in demand (arising, say, from a pay increase in some sectors), these suppliers will soon find that the same phenomenon that has increased the prices of their products has also increased the prices of their raw materials, and so on.

Indeed, if pay rises do not match the increase in prices, they may eventually find themselves facing a fall in demand. Of course, if workers do attempt to maintain their real wages in the face of rising inflation, the same voices currently raised in support of the Bank of England’s actions will be turned against them in loud condemnation, and they will be blamed for that inflation.

The situation will be made worse by the “assets” that the Bank is buying from other banks. Not their most profitable ones, for certain, but the “toxic

assets” – such as “securities” based on sub-prime mortgage debts – which drove a number of banks to the wall, and brought others to their knees to such an extent that they had to be bailed out with public money, even in the USA, which evinces an extreme aversion to such things. By buying up such assets, the Bank of England – and, thereby, the public purse – takes on the unmanageable debts entailed by them.

And, in addition to the funds it supplies to the previous owners, the existing assets the latter had earmarked to cover these debts, also become available for further lending.

If that does not sound such a bad thing, it should be borne in mind that the commercial banks are themselves just as responsible for modern inflation as state banks such as the Bank of England or the US Federal Reserve. They provide credit – mainly to commercial, not to domestic customers, far in excess of the value of their own assets, once more placing more money in circulation than is required by the demands of circulation.

That this practice will continue is obvious from the fact that the banks are insisting on retaining the “bonus culture” that saw a few staff – mainly senior – walk away with millions while their banks sank beneath them.

The huge bonuses paid to senior staff

for the profits they brought in encourage an extreme short-termism in their outlook: it is not the low-risk, long-term, low-yield investments that bring in the huge profits, or the huge bonuses.

“Easing” may help the economy in the short term: the greater availability of money, and particularly credit, may encourage increases in production. Such increases have been reported: the Office for National Statistics reported that, in September, manufacturing output rose by 1.7%, compared to a decrease of 2% in August.

It remains to be seen whether this represents a sign of genuine recovery. And, if it does, it may have nothing to do with the Bank of England’s “quantitative easing” (though they will undoubtedly claim the credit).

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that the City is claiming that the Bank’s actions are inadequate. They express this concern in apparently altruistic terms: they are concerned with the possibility of deflation. A general decrease in prices will not help the economy recover in the short term, since it will also bring with it an initial decline in profits.

Classically, this would eventually be balanced by the general fall in prices making production costs cheaper. However, Britain operates in the context of a global economy: if deflation is local, British producers will not be able to compete on the world market for any raw materials that have not suffered a deflationary fall in prices.

The City’s concern is anything but altruistic, and their self-interest is twofold. Firstly, aside from the City institutions which have gone under, the financiers have done very well out of the government’s “solutions” to their problems. The British government, for instance, pumped billions into the City to “nationalise” or otherwise prop up tottering establishments.

That money had to be borrowed – from the City! That is, it went straight back to where it came from, only now with interest attached to it. The ideologists of the bourgeoisie usually decry state handouts to failing businesses, on the grounds that it constitutes “interference” in the workings of the market. But the bourgeoisie itself has never objected to state handouts – as long as they come to them.

Marx once described the state as a joint-stock company for exploiting the wealth of a nation on behalf of the capitalist class. Even if the average capitalist does not admit this, even to himself, he understands it instinctively.

Secondly, the City would suffer the consequences of their own massive

overextension of credit. Classically, during inflation, the debtor benefits: the amount of the principal does not change, but they have more funds with which to repay it. Conversely, they suffer during deflation, because they now have fewer funds with which to pay the same debt.

But financial institutions have lent the same money to several different debtors simultaneously. And often, the “assets” on which they base their lending are themselves actually papers – such as share certificates – representing others’ debts to them.

The whole system is based on the notion that, out of all these debtors, there will be sufficiently few failures to prevent the whole system collapsing like a house of cards. Inflation, by making it easier for debtors to repay, protects the system; conversely, deflation, by making repayment harder, brings the whole thing closer to collapse.

Each debt to the bank is treated by the bank as an asset, upon which it can base further lending. Each default shows how worthless such assets really are. The more defaults there are, the more we see how worthless an entire bank is, as the financial collapses of last year demonstrated.



The financiers, of course, constitute the long-dominant element of the ruling class. It is inevitable that the government will be constrained to assist them out of the crisis which, in its more peculiar respects, is largely of their – the finance capitalists’ – making.

It is equally inevitable that the assistance will take a form which is as little injurious as possible to those same financiers. Yet, while financial operations dominate the economy of this country, it remains the case that it is the production of commodities (here or abroad) that provides the source of the vast wealth that the financiers manipulate and transfer between each other.

Assistance to this sector of the economy would actually provide a surer way of pulling the economy out of its slump than the inflationary measures being practised by the Bank of England.

We have seen that the Government’s eagerness to help the financiers is

matched by an equal reluctance to provide any assistance to producers or distributors of commodities.

According to the Office for National Statistics, by September of this year, unemployment had reached 2.46 million. The quarterly increase for July to September was represented as the lowest increase in unemployment since March-May 2008.

In assessing the real situation, we also need to take into account latent unemployment – people in part-time work through no choice of their own.

Government statistics show there were nearly 1 million people (997,000) employees and self-employed persons working part-time because they had failed to obtain full-time work – the highest figure since 1992, when such figures were first recorded.

Two more telling statistics are: an increase in unemployment among 18-24 year olds (to 18% of this age group) – many of whom will be trying to find their first jobs; and a decrease in the number of advertised vacancies. There were just 428,000 of these at the end of October 2009.

All of these wholly or partially unemployed individuals represent a significant reduction in demand for a wide range of goods and services. If the Government, instead of printing money to throw at the bankers, were to provide these people with meaningful work, the increase in demand would provide a real boost to the economy, and one which would not entail the risk of rampant inflation.

Of course, neither form of Government assistance to the economy will provide a permanent solution to the problems of capitalism. Rising demand will be followed by rising supply, which will inevitably overshoot demand, bringing prices and, thereby, production, crashing down once more.

The Government’s preferred solution may just well speed up this process by encouraging the financial institutions to repeat many of the practices that triggered the previous crash.

Even without Government help, this will happen anyway (though possibly more slowly). Sub-prime mortgage lending, investment in toxic securities based on that lending, overextension of credit to “reliable” customers (100%-plus mortgages, etc.) largely arose because of the huge quantities of surplus capital in the financial sector.

The bankers needed to find some way of investing it at a profit. If these ways remain closed to them (voluntarily or otherwise), they will find others, equally risky.

How ordinary citizens are drowning in debt

While the Government bails out Britain's debt-ridden banks with billions, millions of ordinary citizens are deep in debt and struggling to cope. "Drowning in Debt" is the latest report from the Citizens Advice Bureaux service in Scotland.

JANE MCKINNON looks at the report's key findings.

Citizens Advice Scotland's report, "Drowning in Debt" was published in June 2009 and is based on a survey of debt clients from a representative sample of bureaux across Scotland.

Although it deals only with Scotland, it is certain the report's findings will be mirrored across the whole of Britain. Below are some extracts in comparison to its last survey in 2003

Lone Parents

The average total debt for lone parents since 2003 has increased by a quarter from £11,469 to £14,963.

Lone parent debt clients face significant "debt stress". For every £1 of monthly income, lone parents owed on average £19 of debt compared to £14 in 2003.

Just under 50% of all debt clients have gone without essentials to manage their debt compared to 33% in 2003.

It is the norm for low income lone parents to go without to provide for their children.

Relationship breakdown, as a reason for debt, was mentioned by just under a third of those surveyed.

Low Income

Around a half of debt clients have monthly household incomes of less than £800 and a quarter less than £400. Just under a half have no income other than pensions or benefits.

Over 50% cited persistent low income as the main reason for financial difficulties.

Debt problems are often caused by changes in family circumstances that reduce incomes - job loss, relationship breakdowns and higher cost of living. Even small reductions in income can be significant for those on a low income.

Those on a low income are less likely to have access to low interest mainstream credit and instead rely on high-

er cost credit options such as home credit, doorstep loans, higher interest credit cards, pay day advances etc.

Low income debt clients are more likely to owe money to a local authority and three times more likely to have debt with a utility company than debt clients with a higher income.

Older Debt Clients

Older people have the highest levels of debt of all ages owing an average of £26,010. Their debt level has increased by almost 50% in the last two years.



They have the lowest income and the highest number of debts overall, averaging almost seven debts each compared with around six for Citizens Advice debt clients in general.

Usually levels of debt increase with age but incomes reduce resulting in the over 60 age group having less opportunity to repay their debt.

Older people are less likely to borrow from family and friends with 12% doing so compared to 43% of those under 25.

Just under 50% of all debt clients have gone without essentials to manage their debt.

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Scenes from working class life

Disabled and Sick Debt Clients

41% of Citizens Advice debt clients cite illness or disability as reasons for their debt problem, as opposed to 33% in 2003. Sick or disabled debt clients had an average of six debts and owed an average of £20,588.

Households with sick or disabled people were significantly more likely to have a utilities prepayment meter

Nine out of ten said debt had a negative impact on their health. Almost all said debt affected their mental health and a third their physical health.

Young People

Clients aged 16-24 have a lower level of debt than other age groups - £9,679 compared to an overall average of £20,914

However, their average level of debt has nearly doubled since 2004 and is increasing twice as fast as that for all clients.

The proportion of young people with credit card debts has increased by nearly 50% since 2004.

Young people were more likely to hold overdraft debts (59%), catalogue debts (41%) and hire purchase agreements (18%).

Creditor Behaviour

Twice as many clients than in 2003 were being threatened with informal debt recovery action

Creditors have taken some form of recovery action on four out of five debts, with Local Authorities, student loan companies and UK Government agencies most likely to take action.

Almost one in five debt clients felt pressured to re-finance their debt or to borrow more money.

Citizens Advice Scotland's **Drowning in Debt** report can be accessed on their website www.cas.org.uk

Charlie: a 21st century worker

Charlie was unemployed for 10 months. He is a victim of the recession which has, and still is, having a particularly brutal effect on the building trade.

JANE McKINNON reports on conditions at the Hewlett Packard computer assembly plant in Bishopton.

Charlie signed on at the dole every fortnight whilst applying for jobs, without any success. His £128.60 a fortnight Jobseekers Allowance didn't go far and Charlie had to drastically curtail nights out with his mates and ditch the idea of a holiday with his girlfriend.

Becoming despondent and feeling he was never going to be employed again, Charlie answered an advert for a job with one of the contractors who operate for Hewlett Packard at their massive computer assembly campus in a rural setting in the Bishopton-Erskine area, 13 miles from Glasgow.

Charlie was pleased to get the job but his wages and conditions leave much to be desired. He works three 12 hour shifts a week and does an additional one shift a month to bring his weekly hours to 39.

He is paid £5.99p an hour and his annual salary is £12,139. His employment is for a six months period on a Temporary/Fixed Term Contract which carries with it a three months' probationary performance review.

As a temporary worker Charlie misses out on some of the benefits afforded to the company's permanent staff and his annual holiday entitlement is only 15 days per annum.

The company work their shifts so that production is on a 24 hours basis. Charlie's shift begins at 6.45 a.m. and finishes at 6.45 p.m. Within this period he is allowed four breaks.

His travel to and from work is difficult and expensive due to the location of the plant and his early start.

While Charlie thinks he is lucky to have a job, he is anxious that he might be paid off after his three months' probationary period. Another concern he has is that, if he is kept on, his temporary contract will only be for another three months and he might not be able to find another job when it finishes.

He'd dearly love to be employed at his own trade where he earned more than double what he does now: but Charlie is not thinking that far ahead.

His employer is one of a number operating within the Hewlett Packard plant.

Like other villages in the area Bishopton grew to accommodate an influx of migrants from the cities of Glasgow and Paisley, attracted by the rural setting and quieter way of life but also by the opportunity of employment with one of the biggest employers in the area.



At that time, the biggest employer was the Royal Ordnance Factory which began production in 1940 during World War II.

In 1987 the computer company Compaq arrived and built the massive assembly and production plant but after running into difficulty, it was taken over by Hewlett Packard in 2002. That year also saw the Royal Ordnance Factory cease production.

At one time Compaq had 2,500 of a workforce but around 700 of those jobs were lost in the takeover by California-based Hewlett Packard.

And like its predecessor, Hewlett Packard is now planning to turn its

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back on the workforce who helped make it the profitable company it is today. Earlier this year the company announced it was closing its Bishopton plant and transferring the work to the Czech Republic.

At the same time around 800 skilled and unskilled workers were made redundant out of a total workforce of 1,300. Those remaining, are mostly employed by companies like Charlie's that provide a component supply chain and customer support.

However, the future of these jobs is uncertain with the announcement by Hewlett Packard that there was no cast iron guarantee these jobs would remain.

But Hewlett Packard are not only planning to close their operations in Scotland, they have also closed their manufacturing base in Germany and altogether made 6,000 workers redundant throughout Europe, the Middle East and Africa. This, despite making a £5 billion profit last year.

Hewlett Packard claim that for it to remain competitive and survive, they have to cut jobs and they need to relocate to a lower cost, out-sourced site in the Czech Republic.

How many times have we heard this argument and how galling that companies like Hewlett Packard will continue to maximise their profits at the expense of their workers.

Charlie is one of thousands of workers who have been deeply affected by the recession. He is one of many who are forced to accept low pay and poor working conditions under a system that exploits them while at the same time their bosses are searching the world for another workforce to exploit even more.

Last week I said to Charlie "How's the job" and he said "fine". Then he looked me in the eye, shook his head and said "No, it's terrible."

UK elections are seriously out of favour

Britain's General Election battle lines have been drawn. In the words of Willie Bain MP (pictured below), Labour's successful candidate in the Glasgow North East by-election, "It is Game On" between Labour and the Tories.

JAMES THOMSON looks at the Labour and Conservative parties' electoral prospects in the run up to this year's General Election.

For the first time in many months, Labour has cut the Conservatives' lead in the opinion polls following its comfortable victory in the Glasgow North East Westminster Parliamentary by-election on 12 November (see Tables 1 and 2).

This victory has buoyed Labour leaders because, as they know, unpopular Governments rarely win by-elections so near to their end of term.

There is one problem though which is that although the polls suggest the Labour Party might close the gap on the Tories, the same polls claim Gordon Brown is still regarded as Labour's biggest liability. The third failed plot to remove Brown - on January 6 - by Blairites, Geoff Hoon and Patricia Hewitt is evidence that voters and many in the Labour Party itself believe Brown is Labour's greatest impediment to success.

Nevertheless, it seems certain that Brown will lead Labour into the General Election. If he chooses to give himself all the time he can to try and claw back the Tories' lead, that should mean a May or June election.

Alternatively it could be March. The Chancellor's Pre-Budget report in December singularly failed to give any detail on Labour's widely expected public spending cuts and tax rises. That detail will most likely be forthcoming in the Budget at the end of March/beginning of April. Obviously a spending cuts/higher taxes Budget would be bad for Labour. A March election, before the real Budget is announced, might be Labour's best prospect.

Already it is clear that the biggest battles will be fought over who can best and speedily bring about Britain's economic recovery. Drastic cuts in public spending will also be a major battleground. It is hard to take seriously any-



thing both parties say or promise before the election since all they are interested in is saying what is likely to help change the opinion polls and get them elected.

The only real recent poll of how voters are feeling was the Glasgow North East by-election in November. What was significant about that result, was not so much that Labour held on to a 74 year old stronghold, but that the vast majority of that constituency's electorate - a record 67% - chose not to vote at all.

The turnout among Glasgow North East's 62,475 voters was only 32.97%. This is the lowest ever recorded for a UK Parliamentary by-election in Scotland. The previous low was 36.2% in the Falkirk West by-election in December 2000.

This record low turnout followed the low of 34.5% in the June 2009 European Parliament UK elections and the equally poor turnout at the English local elections also in June.

Glasgow North East was the seat of the disgraced former Speaker of the House of Commons, Michael Martin - now Baron Martin of Springburn - one of Labour's biggest casualties of the Westminster MPs' expenses scandals.

Glasgow North East voters had good reason therefore to be turned-off and, by a margin of over three to one, they voted to stay at home.

In this depressed political atmosphere and the resultant vacuum, progressives

feared that the racist-fascist British National Party (BNP) would do well perhaps even eclipsing the Tories and saving their deposit, something they have never before achieved in Scotland.

That did not happen but nevertheless the BNP's 4.92% share of the vote, its best ever in Scotland - a party requires 5% to save its deposit - should give no one any comfort. This deeply reactionary force in British politics will not go away soon.

The appalling turnout in Glasgow North East underlines, if ever it needed it, the all time low regard in which politicians of all parties are held. Politics as we know it and electoralism as we know it are seriously out of favour.

In France, in that country's last Presidential election, voter turnout was over 90%. That level of turnout suggests the population as a whole are engaged with the political and electoral process. It also suggests they understand its relevance and importance to their lives.

In Britain, politics and elections are fast becoming a minority interest.

Britain's population is around 61 million and its electorate fluctuates around the 43 million mark.

In the 1987 General Election, 32.5 million people voted, a turnout of 75.3%.

In 1992, 33.5 million voted, a turnout of 77.4%.

In 1997, it was 31.3 million: turnout 71.2%.

In 2001 only 26.4 million, the lowest since 1918, went to the polls, a turnout of 59%.

In May 2005, 27.1 million voted, a turnout of 61%.

From 1987 to 2005 therefore - the years of Kinnock/New Labour - more than five million more voters chose not to cast their vote, a turnout drop of

Table 1 POLL OF POLLS: 2006-2009

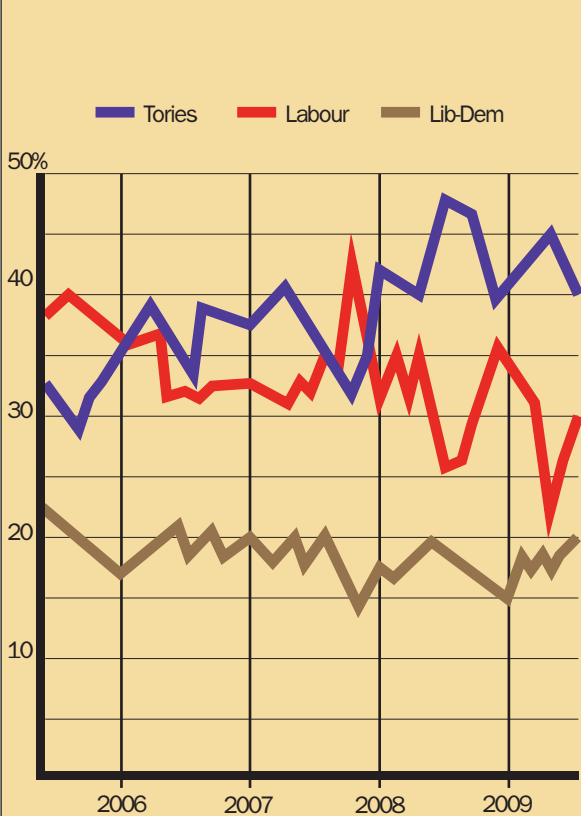


Table 2 GLASGOW NORTH EAST BY-ELECTION
12 November 2009

| PARTY | VOTES | %SHARE |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--------|
| Labour | 12,231 | 59.39 |
| Scottish National Party | 4,120 | 20 |
| Conservative | 1,075 | 5.22 |
| British National Party | 1,013 | 4.92 |
| Solidarity (split from SSP) | 794 | 3.86 |
| Lib Dems | 474 | 2.30 |
| Total votes cast | 20,595 | |
| Voter turnout | 32.97% | |

GENERAL ELECTION 2005: Glasgow North East

| PARTY | VOTES | %SHARE |
|--------------------------|---------------|--------|
| Speaker-Michael Martin | 15,153 | 53.3 |
| SNP | 5,019 | 17.7 |
| Socialist Labour | 4,036 | 14.2 |
| Scottish Socialist Party | 1,402 | 4.9 |
| Scottish Unionist | 1,266 | 4.5 |
| BNP | 920 | 3.2 |
| Independent | 622 | 2.2 |
| Total votes cast | 28,418 | |
| Voter turnout | 45.8% | |

Source: BBC News.
Tories and Lib-Dems did not contest as it was the Speaker's seat.

14%. In 2005 around 15 million voters voted with their feet and stayed at home.

If the June 2009 EU Elections, the English local elections and the Glasgow North East by-election turnouts are factored into the forthcoming General Election, that stay at home figure could be anywhere between 15 million and 30 million! If this year's pattern continues there is every possibility that fewer than half the population of Britain will vote at this year's General Election.

Such is the depth of the disenchantment with all three main parties and the disengagement with the electoral process, it is hard to predict which of them will come off best or worst when voters do go to the polls.

How the various 'classes' of UK society voted in 2005 and in 1999 can be seen in Table 3, Page 10.

A significant percentage of the appalling turnout at Glasgow North East can be put down to the recent MPs' expenses scandals but as the above figures show, UK voters' disenchantment pre-dates the current and continuing pecuniary infamy of our elected and un-elected representatives.

Most probably it is because the majority of voters find it virtually impossible to separate the New Labour of Blair, Mandelson and Brown from

the 'caring Conservatism' of David Cameron's Tories.

And if you can't tell the difference between the two political parties who are certain to form the next government, it is possible you will decide not to vote. Given that "they are all the same anyway", you'll get the same result - the same sort of government - whether you stay at home or turn up to vote, so why bother?

Margaret Thatcher and her Conservatives pretty much dominated politics in Britain during the 1980s and 90s. It is over 26 years, nearly a generation, since Neil Kinnock, aided and abetted by his right hand man Peter Mandelson, became leader of the Labour Party. Kinnock began the process of forcing the left in the party and in the broader Labour and trade union movement into retreat.

That process reached its apogee with the formation, by Blair, Mandelson and Brown, of the New Labour Party, the removal of Clause 4, the diminution of trade union influence and of course New Labour's complete endorsement of British capitalism and imperialism "as the only way".

The positioning of the Labour Party "resolutely ... in the ... centre of British politics", as Mandelson puts it, has left the British people, like the people of the

USA, with two main parties that have very different roots and histories but have become very similar parties.

New Labour, compliant trades unions and a defeated left were the result within the labour and working class movement of nearly two decades of that Thatcher-Tory dominance.

In the subsequent decade, Blair and New Labour became the defining force in British politics winning three elections in a row. Caring Conservatism and a new leader - David Cameron - were the result of that decade of New Labour dominance. During Thatcher Labour shifted to the right and into the centre ground of British politics. Then during Blair's New Labour decade the Tories also eventually changed tack to regain the centre.

These shifts have resulted in two main capitalist parties which are very hard to tell apart. The British people have had a generation of this Tweedledum and Tweedledee main party politics and it has been an electoral turn-off.

Their different roots and different histories mean they have different constituencies to whom they must appeal.

New Labour's No.1 electoral strategist, Baron Mandelson knows there is less than a cigarette paper between New Labour and the Tories on the fun-

damental issue of support for British capitalism and imperialism.

But to win the votes of traditional Labour supporters he knows they need to convince voters in Labour heartlands that there is a difference. Labour needs to get every working class voter who is thinking of staying at home out to vote.

That's why Mandelson and Brown are summoning up the really old Labour past - Labour's foundation at the turn of the last century as the mass party of the working class.

Brown's 'class attack' on David Cameron's Etonian schooldays, the Party Political Broadcast showing footage of

Labour's origins in the democratic and progressive struggles of the 1900s and again during the decades from the 1920s to the 1950s, are all designed to dupe party and people into believing there is a fundamental difference between the two main parties.

If there is a difference today between the Tories and Labour, it is no longer a difference of ideological substance - of capitalism vs socialism - but merely a difference of degree.

One difference of material substance is the affiliation of most of Britain's trades union to the Labour Party.

Sadly, as a force for progress and change Britain's trades unions are still struggling to reverse the strategic set back they suffered during the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government defeated the miners' union in their fight against pit closures and introduced a series of anti-trades union laws.

Kinnock's and Mandelson's first moves to shift the Labour Party to the right coincided with that period of trades union retreat and made all the easier the subsequent Labour leadership attacks on trades union influence, notably over the one member one vote rules change.

Not only has the left been defeated inside the party, the trades unions have been forced to the margins and are only tolerated as a secure source of funding.

The only dividing line in the New Labour Party these days - like the division between Labour and the Tories - is no longer between left and right, but largely personal - Brown vs Blair. One

Table 3

WHO VOTED FOR THE PARTIES % support in 2005 (% in 1997)

| | TORY | LABOUR | LIB-DEMS |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Men | 33 (28) | 38 (47) | 21 (17) |
| Women | 32 (35) | 38 (43) | 23 (17) |
| AB (middle class) | 37 (43) | 32 (30) | 24 (21) |
| C1 (lower middle class) | 34 (35) | 35 (37) | 24 (21) |
| C2 (skilled workers) | 32 (28) | 43 (52) | 18 (13) |
| DE (unskilled workers) | 28 (21) | 45 (58) | 19 (15) |
| Age 18-24 | 24 (25) | 42 (50) | 26 (17) |
| Age 25-34 | 24 (27) | 42 (50) | 26 (17) |
| Age 35-64 | 33 (31) | 38 (43) | 22 (18) |
| Age 65+ | 42 (38) | 35 (42) | 18 (15) |
| Home Owners with mortgage | 30 (32) | 39 (41) | 23 (19) |
| Home owners owning outright | 43 (42) | 30 (36) | 20 (16) |
| Council Tenants | 16 (15) | 56 (65) | 19 (13) |
| ALL VOTERS | 33 (31) | 36 (43) | 23 (17) |

Source: ICM.

of the developments that is currently helping Labour enhance its appeal is the relative absence of the Blairite campaign to remove Brown.

Since last summer when Mandelson was elevated by Brown, Labour has had some appearance of being united, or at least not dis-united. Mandelson's presence at the centre of things re-assures even the most ardent of Blairites who loathe Brown that, their erstwhile leader's legacy is in safe hands.

But there is only so much that one man can do to protect the "beloved leader" Tony: the Iraq Inquiry is a case in point. This was set-up by Brown to take the heat off himself as the new Prime Minister, which he needed badly, and to put the blame where it chiefly belongs, with Blair.

The carpet under which the British ruling class has swept thorny issues over the centuries must surely be a mile high. Brown could easily have swept Iraq under the same carpet and left it for half a century before historians unearthed some of the truth.

But he quite deliberately chose not to do so. Brown knows he, like all members of Blair's Cabinet at the time, is complicit in the decision. Nevertheless he took the calculated risk that the inquiry's revelations about his role as Britain's war accountant would be as nothing compared to that of "Yo Blair's" zealous determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with George W Bush and US imperialism as they set about wreaking vengeance for the 9/11 attacks on American soil.

Brown has ensured the Iraq Inquiry's

report will not come out until after the General Election. He also hoped his attendance at the Inquiry would be after the election. But he has seriously mis-calculated the impact the Inquiry has had on his role. He is now scheduled to attend in mid-February, two weeks after the star of the show, Tony Blair's performance, and it is clear it is likely to damage him as much as Blair.

The pattern of evidence from Britain's top military chiefs, diplomats, spies and Blair's former cabinet colleagues is that Blair was indeed Bush's poodle. With a few exceptions - Alistair Campbell - the witnesses sought to distance themselves from Blair's dodgy, some say illegal, decision for war. Blair was the box office witness on

29 January and his already tarnished reputation was further sullied as millions watched him at the Inquiry trying and failing to squirm his way out of his admission, to the BBC's Fern Brittan on 13 December 2009, that weapons of mass destruction or not, he would still have followed Bush into war

By letting the inquiry he established blame Blair, and then committing more British troops to the war in Afghanistan, Brown is endorsing US President Obama's dumb analysis that Iraq was a "dumb war" and Afghanistan is somehow a "just war."

This helps him cultivate an image of a Prime Minister who is on the side of Britain's "dedicated and valourous" troops who are defending the British way of life from evil Islamist jihadis.

From the public turnout and applause which returning troops - dead and alive - receive as they parade along Britain's high streets, and the fact that army recruitment has risen by 25%, Brown knows public support for British troops in Afghanistan is high and he cannot afford to be seen to be equivocal or distant from that support.

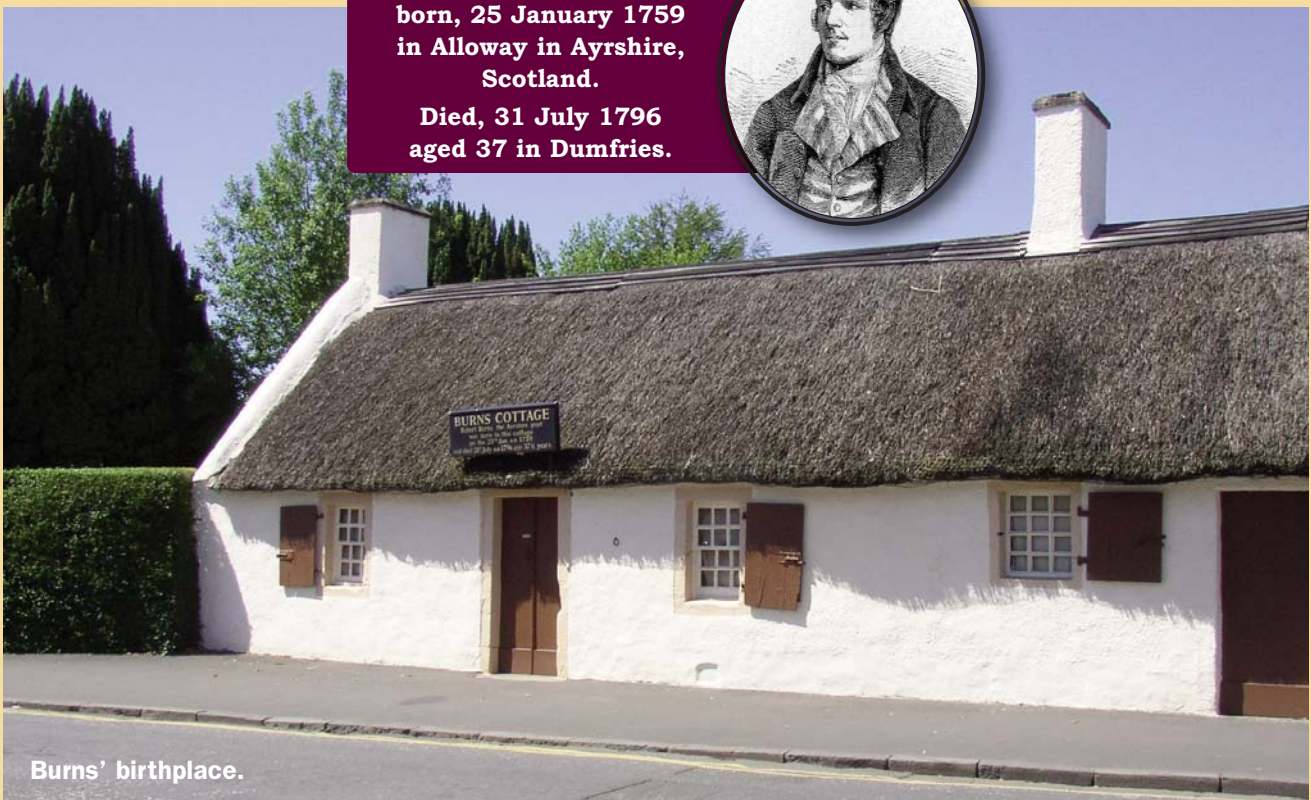
Supporting Obama's 18-months "surge" in Afghanistan and playing on British fears of Islamist terror, Brown will go into the General Election hoping he has done enough to create an image of himself as a Churchillian Prime Minister, leading his country in a 'just war'.

If he can avoid any further PR gaffes and disasters, Brown should fight the

Continued on page 26

Robert Burns 250th Anniversary

ROBERT BURNS
born, 25 January 1759
in Alloway in Ayrshire,
Scotland.
Died, 31 July 1796
aged 37 in Dumfries.



Burns' birthplace.

Man of his times

By Alex Davidson

Burns lived during a time of momentous change. It was one of the most dramatic and far-reaching periods of technological change in human history. He was born at the beginning of the industrial revolution.

Some fifty years earlier, in 1707, the Scottish parliament had agreed to join the English parliament mainly because Scotland was promised free trade with England and England's colonies. With this, Glasgow, in particular, developed a very profitable trade in tobacco from Virginia, "the huge prize of the union",⁽¹⁾ and sugar from the West

Indies, both of which relied on the slave trade. Edinburgh was the second largest city in Britain after London; and Norwich was the third largest reflecting the predominantly agricultural mode of production at this time prior to the industrial revolution. (see table, page 12)

In the 1760s and 1770s the social and economic structure of Scotland began a "process of transformation unparalleled among European soci-

eties in its speed, scale and intensity ... Scottish industrialisation was explosive; that of England, cumulative, protracted and ... evolutionary in character."⁽²⁾

Economic Development

Burns was aware of these economic developments and commented on them.

After a visit to the Carron Iron Works, near Falkirk, built in the year of his birth, he wrote:

"We cam na here to view your warks
In hopes to be mair wise

Population of Towns/Cities in Britain 1750-1840

| Year | Edinburgh | Glasgow | Norwich | Birmingham | Leeds | Liverpool | Manchester |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------|------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| c1755 | 57,195 | 31,700 | 36,169 | 30,804 | 17,121 | 34,407 | 27,246 |
| 1801 | 81,600 | 83,700 | 36,832 | 73,670 | 53,163 | 79,722 | 90,399 |
| 1810 | 103,143 | 108,890 | | | | | |
| 1821 | 138,000 | 147,000 | | | | | |
| 1841 | | | 62,344 | 190,542 | 151,870 | 264,298 | 296,183 |

But only, lest we gang to hell
It may be nae surprise."

Three years after the opening of the iron works there were 1200 workers employed by the Carron company.⁽³⁾

When Burns was a boy the spinning of cotton was revolutionised by the inventions of Hargreaves, Crompton and Arkwright, who in collaboration with David Dale, established New Lanark in 1784. By 1799, three years after Burns' death, Robert Owen, Dale's son-in-law, had taken over New Lanark and was employing more than 2000 workers in what was the biggest cotton mill in Scotland.

Economic advance was stimulated by inventions such as James Watt's development of Newcomen's steam engine. James Watt (1736-1819), born in Greenock, established an instrument making workshop at Glasgow University, where he became a close friend of Joseph Black (1728-1799). Black's discovery of latent heat was an integral part of Watt's invention of the separate condenser.

When Matthew Boulton took over the patent of Watt's invention, Watt



The gilded bronze statue of Matthew Boulton, James Watt and William Murdoch in Birmingham.

moved to work with Boulton at his factory in Birmingham in 1767. It was here that his engineering developments were put to widespread use in industry. Prior to his move, Watt had been associated with the Lunar Society, a club of industrialists and intellectuals based in Birmingham, a centre of the industrial revolution.

Its members included Matthew Boulton, Erasmus Darwin (physician and grandfather of Charles Darwin), Josiah Wedgwood (the potter, and Charles Darwin's other grandfather) and Joseph Priestley (theologian, political theorist and discoverer of oxygen). There are several monuments commemorating the club and its members in Birmingham including, the gilded bronze statue of Watt, Boulton and Murdoch, known as "The Golden Boys". Many of the Lunar Society were leading abolitionists (ie for the abolition of slavery). The Medallion, created by Wedgwood, depicting a negro slave in chains became the emblem of the Abolitionist movement (see page 18).

There was a revolution in communications with the building of canals (Trent and Mersey), bridges (Severn) and roads through the works of Thomas Telford and John Macadam.

Burns took part in the trial of one of the earliest steamboats on Dalswinton Loch in 1788. It was one of the first ships to have an iron hull. Its engines were built by William Symington and the design was by the engineer, Alexander Nasmyth, who was also a painter. It is his portrait of Burns which is the most familiar today. He was the father of James Nasmyth, inventor of the steam hammer.

People moved from the country to the towns to find work in the new factories. There was a huge growth in the size of towns and they grew exponentially over the next hundred years.

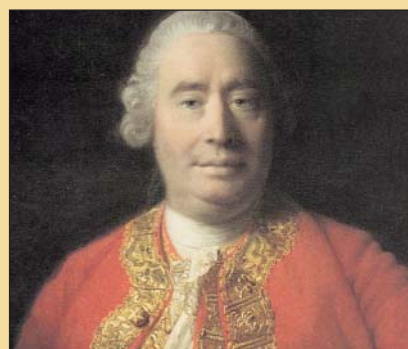
Norwich was by-passed by the industrial revolution and the great industrial cities of Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester and Glasgow emerged. (see table)

In this rapidly changing economic environment there was to be found in Scotland a brilliant intellectual life in philosophy, aesthetics, medicine, law and the natural sciences. It was the era of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The Scottish Enlightenment

Intellectual development in the 17th century had been severely curtailed by the church and religion. However, this changed in the following century.

In the vanguard of this was the Scottish philosopher and historian, David Hume (pictured below) (1711-1776). He "uproot(ed) all traditional certainties: matter, the soul, God, Nature, causation, miracles"⁽⁴⁾ And he had a view that 'almost all' govern-



ments had their origin in violence.⁽⁵⁾

His scepticism drew towards him enemies from church and state. He offered compelling criticisms of standard theistic proofs. He wrote against the common view that God plays an important role in the creation and reinforcement of moral values. Hume offered one of the first purely secular moral theories, which grounded morality in the positive and useful

consequences that result from our actions. Hume travelled widely in Europe, and was for a period a close friend of Rousseau. He returned to Edinburgh and was employed as Librarian at the Faculty of Advocates in the 1750s during which he wrote his 'History of England'.

After a diplomatic career in France he settled in Edinburgh from 1769 and was a considerable influence on, and friend, of Adam Smith.

The Scottish Historical School was both realistic and progressive, with Adam Smith, the champion of the claims of competitive capitalism, at the centre. Its main representatives apart from Smith were professors of the universities – Adam Ferguson of Edinburgh, John Millar of Glasgow, William Robertson of Edinburgh – and there were a number of Scottish dignitaries of the time who were associated with them, such as Lord Kames, James Dunbar and Hugh Blair.

This school of thought was based on a humanist and rationalist outlook. There was a belief in the fundamental importance of human reason combined with a rejection of any authority which could not be justified by reason. They were denounced by opponents as atheists.

A number of circumstances contributed to the formation of this type of thought in Scotland. These included the situation in the universities and the general social environment in which they were set. "The university lecturers formed a society cut off from England but in close intellectual exchange and even personal touch with France (cf Hume and Smith). The Scottish universities were not, like Oxford and Cambridge, situated apart from the turmoil of commercial life, but in the great cities."⁽⁶⁾

Adam Smith, born in 1723, became Professor at the age of 28 and published his 'Wealth of Nations' in 1776. Smith's method, when dealing with almost every aspect of society, was to review its historical growth under different forms and relations of property.

He defined four types of society differentiated by different modes of production – hunting, pasturage, farming and commerce. According to Smith the process of social development was not governed by a supernatural (religious) or a moral principle but was a completely secular, material process. Frederick Engels referred to Adam Smith as the "Luther of Political Economy".



Adam Ferguson in his 'History of Civil Society' argued that with the existence of private property, a principle of political development is given – "property is a matter of progress". Further, property produces "civil antagonisms". Ferguson showed that the division of labour comes into being only with the existence of private property. In writing of the division of labour he asserts that "thinking itself has become a peculiar craft".⁽⁷⁾

John Millar, one of the first sociologists, extended some aspects of the general criticism of eighteenth century society. He expressed opposition to the growth of the power of the Crown, advocated parliamentary reform, spoke against the counter-revolutionary campaign for intervention in France and his lectures contained a strong critique of slavery.⁽⁸⁾ He was a member of the Society of the Friends of the People.

At this time there were also to be found James Hutton, the father of modern Geology; Robert Foulis, the artist and printer, who established one of the earliest Academies of Art; the portrait painter, Henry Raeburn; and

the architect, Robert Adam. The New Town of Edinburgh was completed just after the death of Burns. Not surprisingly given this intellectual climate the first Encyclopaedia Britannica was published in 1771 in Edinburgh.

Moreover, these intellectuals were in touch with Continental and American thought. Rousseau was a close friend of David Hume for a time. Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of America, travelled to Birmingham in 1758 and returned again in 1760 to conduct experiments with Matthew Boulton in electricity and sound. Voltaire commented, "It is a remarkable result of the progress of the human spirit that at the present time it is from Scotland we receive rules of taste in the arts – from the epic poem to gardening."

Burns mixed with many of these people and knew their work. Adam Smith took four subscriptions for the Edinburgh edition of Burns' poems and tried to procure a government sinecure for the poet. As a boy, Walter Scott met Burns at the home of Professor Adam Ferguson in Edinburgh and later recounted his impressions. So Burns was not a 'heaven-sent ploughman' as some would have it, but rather a man of his time. And, it was a historically unique period: the beginning of industrial capitalism, with all its attendant revolutionary changes. It was the period of the Scottish Enlightenment.

FOOTNOTES:

- (1) Devine, TM "Three Hundred Years of the Anglo-Scottish Union", p4, in 'Scotland and the Union, 1701-2007', ed TM Devine, Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- (2) Devine, TM, "The Spoils of Empire", p91, in 'Scotland and the Union, 1707-2007', ed TM Devine, Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- (3) Johnston, Tom, "A History of the Working Classes in Scotland", p367, Forward Publishing, 1923, Glasgow.
- (4) Willey, Basil, 'The Eighteenth Century Background' quoted in Smout, TC, 'A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830', p451, Collins, Glasgow, 1969.
- (5) Gilmour, Ian, "Riot, Risings and Revolution", p41, Hutchinson, London, 1992.
- (6) Pascal, Roy, "Property and Society: the Scottish Historical School of the Eighteenth Century", p168 in the Modern Quarterly, Volume 1, Number 2, April 1938.
- (7) This statement is quoted several times in the works of Karl Marx
- (8) Whyte, Iain, "Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838", p59, Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns

“Burns ... Mair nonsense has been uttered in his name
Than in ony's barrin' liberty – and Christ.”

Thus Hugh MacDiarmid, in the midst of a diatribe against the Burns cult, in his poem of 1926 “A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle”.

Your Excellency, Ladies, Gentlemen, friends – it is an honour to be asked to propose the “Immortal Memory of Robert Burns” in such distinguished company; an honour – and a problem! Whose memory is it that we propose to make immortal?

Psychologists tell us that our own memories are not only fallible, but are as much reconstructions, re-interpretations (even inventions) of the past as much as anything else. We see the past through the filtering lens of our present consciousness, our present hopes, our present sense of ourselves.

Does this invalidate the whole idea of such a toast as the “Immortal Memory”?

Does it make us lift our glasses more cautiously? Or does it give us a better sense of the complex richness and potential of the human spirit?

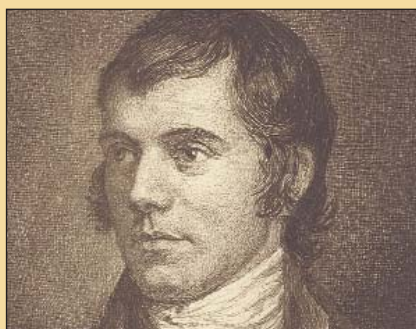
When individuals become heroes – even literary heroes – something of them becomes detached, becomes, in a real sense, public property. Their spirit is called as a witness in support of current popular sentiment, validating and reinforcing it, even to the extent of becoming a barrier to critical dissent.

Burns' name has often been called upon in support of completely contradictory ideas, although perhaps not as often as those deities of all kinds whose blessing is conferred on the bullets which zip across No-Man's-Land in both directions and who are later invoked to comfort the widows and bereft mothers with the sanctified justice of both causes.

So, there have been all-white Burns Clubs in the racist states of the Deep South of the USA, active at the same time as the haggis was being piped into Burns Suppers in Leningrad and Moscow. By the early 20th century,

By Bill Sweeney

This is an edited version of the toast delivered at the 2008 Burns' Supper in South Africa House hosted by the South African High Commissioner in association with ACTSA Scotland.



there were more than 350 Burns Clubs worldwide: How many different Rabbie's were they toasting?

We Scots take a pride – perhaps naively – in his universality. No other poet has taken such a transcendent grip on so many imaginations: not Shakespeare, not Goethe, or Dante, not even Homer! But with such pride there must come a measure of reflective humility. With so many impersonations, appropriations, can there be anything authentic left, anything left unfiltered, the pure drop?

We used to be told that Burns was the ploughman poet, an barely lettered rustic, from whose unsophisticated spirit verses sprang like Minerva fully armed from the head of Zeus.

This was nonsense. He was the son of a tenant farmer, not a fee'd labourer. He was well-educated and widely read in English and Scots literature and the Bible and also had some knowledge of Latin, French, Arithmetic, History and Geography.

From an early age he was aware of the linguistic duality of the educated Scot, aware of the different registers and the significance of the social usage of both Scots and English languages – and of the sense, substance and rich

potential of their vocabularies.

Many in this gathering, growing up in the complex linguistic and social nexus of South Africa, will have experienced a similar sense of having one language from childhood, perhaps Xhosa? and others, Afrikaans? English? not only as media for communication, but also as signifiers, carriers of substantial elements of the meaning underlying these communications.

But we have also had: Burns the Internationalist and Burns the Patriot, Burns the Early Socialist and Burns the Friend of the Nobility, Burns the Faithful Lover and Burns the Shameless Betrayer, Burns the Jacobite and Burns the Covenanter, Burns the Enthusiast for the Old Traditions and Burns the Iconoclast, the Modernist.

All of them true – and none of them!

But none wholly false either. Popular misconceptions? Yes, but mark the words of Étienne de Senancour, a younger French contemporary of Burns:

“It is good to observe error without disdain: the universality of men would not have believed it if it had not so much relation to, and so many points of conformity with, the truth.” (From “Reveries sur la nature primitive de l'homme – Thoughts on the primitive nature of Man”)

If we are to clear away the accumulated fog of received opinion on Burns we need, I think, to do two things. One is to separate Burns the Man from Burns the Poet and the other is to understand the social landscape, cultural and political, which formed both Man and Poet.

What I am suggesting is that the Man has some responsibility for creating the Poet, but the Poet and what he produces ceases to be responsible for the Man, otherwise we can never rise above the level of the tabloid press or of the tunnel-visioned fanatic for one or other “moral” cause, for both of whom the detection of the Man's feet of clay is a means to avoid dealing with the Poet's ideas.

In another country and another century Yeats' flirtation with 1920s fas-

cism (with “Celtic” hogwash substituting for “Aryan” tripe) should not blind us to his poetic stature, his ability to deliver beautiful and uncomfortable truths about the human condition.

Scotland in the 18th century was still a backward agricultural society and Burns was a strong advocate of modern farming methods, although he seldom had the quality of land with which to deploy his ideas with much success.

There were pockets of wealth in the cities, where the mercantile classes had recovered from the disastrous Darien expedition, after which much of the Scottish aristocracy, having lost their investments in this failed attempt at a Scottish Empire, had consented to have their debts paid (via, amongst others, the novelist Daniel Defoe in his role as agent and spy for the Crown) in return for their votes for the Act of Union of the Scots and English parliaments in 1707.

Thereafter, Scotland’s colonial ambitions were satisfied by the supply of Highland clan followers – now described, much to their incomprehension as “tenants” – as foot soldiers of the British Empire.

The Highland regiments were particularly prized in this respect. Even the lowliest ranked Highland soldiers regarded themselves as “gentlemen” and thus blinded themselves, apart from one or two notorious mutinies, to the mendacity of their officers. General Wolfe said of them in Canada, before the Battle of the Plains and Heights of Abraham of 1759: “They are hardy, intrepid, accustomed to rough country...and no great mischief if they fall”. Thus Scotland became complicit, complementary, but subordinate in the great Imperial project.

Politically, Scotland was run as a satrapy, notably by the Dundas family – Henry Dundas was William Pitt’s right-hand man in Scotland. There were radical, democratic movements, notably amongst the weaving trades and these were often underpinned by the thorny, disputatious wing of Presbyterianism. They found inspiration in the American Revolution and in Thomas Paine’s book “The Rights of Man”, possession of a copy of which led to a sentence of transportation for Thomas Muir of Huntershill, a leader of the radical faction of the “Friends of the People”.

At his trial, when Muir attempted to defend himself against the accusation



Statue of Robert Fergusson outside the Canongate Kirk on Edinburgh’s Royal Mile.

that he was a radical by noting that Jesus Christ himself had been seen as a radical in his day, this observation was met from the bench by Lord Braxfield’s outburst: “Aye, and muckle the guid it did him – he was hingit!” (Yes, and much good it did him – he was hanged!).

It was an era of political repression, but also of philosophical enlightenment. The title of Arthur Herman’s book “The Scottish Enlightenment: How the Scots Invented the Modern World” perhaps overstates the case, but the 18th century was the era of David Hume (1711-76) – many would say our other greatest Scot.

He was a friend of the French Encyclopaedists and was the man who sprang philosophy free of the stranglehold of metaphysics, applying a penetrating scepticism to all propositions and establishing the philosophical basis for scientific methodology.

It was also the era of Adam Smith (1723-90), not only the apostle of capitalism’s break from mercantilism, but also one of its first, and sternest, critics. It was a nation in a state of flux: economically, politically, philosophically and culturally.

When Burns visited Edinburgh in 1787 he found, in Canongate Kirkyard, the grave of the poet Robert Fergusson, Burns’ “elder brother in

Misfortune, By far my elder brother in the Muse”. He found the grave, and found it unmarked, so Burns raised a subscription to erect a headstone and wrote an Epitaph for it:

“No sculptur’d marble here, nor pompous lay,
No story’d urn nor animated bust;
This simple stone pale SCOTIA’s way
To pour her sorrows o’er her POET’s dust”.

Then, mercilessly, he hits his target: “She mourns, sweet, tuneful youth, thy hapless fate,
Tho’ all the pow’rs of song thy fancy fir’d;

Yet luxury and Wealth lay by in state,
And thankless starv’d what they so much admir’d”

During the 1770s, Fergusson had written a poem, “The Daft Days”, celebrating the days between Christmas and the New Year. In it, he says:

“Fiddlers! your pins in temper fix,
And roset weel your fiddlesticks;
But banish vile Italian tricks
Frae out your quorum;
Nor fortes wi’ pianos mix; -
Gie’s Tullochgorum.”

“Tullochgorum” is a traditional Scots fiddle tune, but Fergusson’s bold dismissal of these ‘vile Italian tricks’ might be belied by his professional experience in providing additional verse for a production of Arne’s opera Artaxerxes in 1769, while his artistic sympathies could hardly have run wholly counter to the development of a friendship with the famous castrato Tenducci.

The musicologist David Johnson notes: “... he had a most exact knowledge of what an opera orchestra sounded like. Fergusson was certainly a person who knew his way round the classical music culture.”

To explain the squib, Johnson suggests a change of heart on Fergusson’s part, but in the context of the publishing, performing and composing repertoires of the eighteenth century, his position may be better understood as representing a persistent duality in the national psychology when presented with problems of identity and internationalism, or tradition and modernism.

The consequences of this dualism for Scottish art, music and literature of the nineteenth century, were likened by MacDiarmid to a “specific aboulia” i.e. what the Oxford dictionary refers to as “an absence of willpower or an inability to act decisively, a symptom of schizophrenia or other mental illness”.

The fact that this is no long-dead debate could be gleaned from the letters page of *The Herald* in recent years, where a controversy sparked off by a poll on public funding of the arts had some correspondents excoriating, ‘...non-indigenous classical art-forms rooted in feudal patronage’ and ‘... powerful minority support for an elitist and alien cultural art-form’, while others made the case for, ‘... enough cash for all the arts to flourish and ... a traditional broad-based Scottish education that gives the arts their place among life’s more utilitarian demands’.

In opposition, an appeal to modernity and internationalism was posed by the rhetorical question, ‘Do you want Scotland to be a laughing stock in Scandinavia for the paltry level of its public funding for classical music, opera ...?’, while an article by the music critic Conrad Wilson went so far as to suggest that ‘... by their ability to stage the Ring, civilised countries must be musically judged ...’.

The notion of ‘alien’ influence brings in questions of social values and identity, privileging and authenticity.

The sharp division of literature into Scots or English characteristic of the late eighteenth century was displayed starkly in the work of both Fergusson and Burns.

Musical repertoires displayed a similar dualism (Italian, or Italian-influenced works side-by-side with ‘National’ songs). This sharp division is only possible with the existence of a strong sense of a distinctive culture with its own idioms, associations, iconography and values; but the flight from one idiom to the other demonstrates a cultural, even psychological, crisis, reflecting uncertain reactions to the growing hegemony of economic, linguistic and moral values, represented as modernism at the time, but wrapped up in the association with England which has been characterised as ‘complementary subordination’.

The confusion of ideas and national self-image is exemplified in the case of Thomas Erskine, the Earl of Kellie, born in 1732, now recognised, in MacDiarmid’s words, as “one of the few musical geniuses Scotland has so far produced.” His work was discussed by Thomas Robertson in his “Inquiry into the fine arts” of 1784: “In his works”, we read, “ the fervidum ingenuity of his country bursts forth, and elegance is mingled with fire. From the singular ardour and impetuosity of



Burns’ home in Dumfries

his temperament, joined to his German education, under the celebrated Stamitz ... this great composer has employed himself chiefly in symphonies, but in a style peculiar to himself. While others please and amuse, it is his province to rouse and almost overset his hearer. Loudness, rapidity, enthusiasm, announced the Earl of Kellie. What appears singularly peculiar in this musician is what may be called the velocity of his talents.”

Now the psychological divide represents itself within the bounds of art music itself and the most advanced style in the development of musical thought is represented as a throwback to manners of speech, gesture and intellectual temper which the enlightenment forces rejected as ‘Scotticisms’. Kellie later retreated from public musical life and his work, until recent times, was forgotten.

This cultural paradox affected Burns too: his adoption of Scots or English as the medium for his poetry carried its own message. In Scots, we find ardent love songs, deep reflections on nature and human nature and biting social satire – “The Holy Fair”, “Holy Wullie’s Prayer”, “Twa Dugs”. In English, there is a tendency to formal speech, high-flown similes, much less dissonance and much more ease with the order of society.

Perhaps it is too easy to contrast the Scots of:

“The rank is but the guinea-stamp,
The man’s the gowd for a’ that”
- with the equivocation, in English, of:

“In politics if thou would’st mix
And mean thy fortunes be;
Bear this in mind, be deaf and blind
Let great folks hear and see.”
Too easy? But there is a battle going on.

Perhaps this conflict lies behind Burns’ later turning to the collection of folksong.

In itself, this was a heroic task: collection of material, joining up fragments from different sources, the invention of material to fill gaps and the selection of appropriate melodies. These were brought together first of all for James Johnson’s “Scots Musical Museum” and then for the Edinburgh publisher George Thomson.

This monumental labour still represents one of the most far-reaching and artistically brilliant acts of ethnomusicology in the history of human culture, but even here the duality remains. Thomson wanted to avoid the affectations of the Italianate style in his accompaniments to the songs. He wanted the essence of Scots song to be brought out and for it to take its place in the modern world so he sent the tunes (without the words!) to Vienna, to be set by the great composers of the day: Haydn, Beethoven, Weber and others, such as Kozeluch. They, of course, made their settings in their own idiom – what we would now refer to as the “Classical” style.

The tunes, however, did not behave as they should! For example, Scots music tends to avoid graceful, prepared modulations from one musical key to another, it simply swings back and forth, straight to and straight back from each tonal centre. (In many ways just like African “pendulum” harmony.)

In addition, Scots tunes often fail to come to rest on the tonic, the tonal centre of the tune: there is often the (deliberate) feeling that the tune has been left in mid-air, so to speak. The resulting Viennese song settings were intriguing.

Some composers edited the tunes to fit their own style, while others, notably poor Kozeluch, displayed increasing exasperation, littering their scores with pointed accents, like musical expletives in the tune’s margins.

The outcome is still hotly contested. One of my distinguished colleagues, Dr Kenneth Elliot, has described them in print as “generally disastrous”, while another, Professor Marjorie Rycroft, has devoted years of research in preparing and correcting manuscripts for the authoritative Haydn edition and having the results professionally recorded.

I hope that I won’t be accused of cowardice if I here suspend my judgement between two such heavyweight intellects. But I will leave some of the evidence, in the shape of recordings of the Burns/Haydn repertoire, with Your

Excellency Ms Lindiwe Mabuza, for her to sift the pros and cons and come to a considered judgement: if not of Solomon, at least of Kwazulu Natal!

What did the Scots do when presented with this kindly meant misrepresentation of our national genius? Well, of course, we adopted the style as our own! And throughout the next century or so, even up to this day, one can hear Scots songs sung to well-behaved, irrelevant accompaniments, fiddlers sawing away at bowdlerised rhythms and ranks of accordions crashing through tonal gear changes. Times and styles do change, however and there is now a healthy contest of “authenticities” and borrowings, although it is not Vienna whose cultural tanks are on our lawn, but Nashville’s.

Something of the same process affected our traditional national dress. In contemporary Scotland, “Highland” dress is now a popular feature, often adopted for weddings, graduations and other formal occasions.

But it is a tradition largely invented by the novelist Walter Scott, who cobbled together an adaption of some features of the traditional clothing of the Gaelic Highlands to fit the corpulent figure of King George IV on the occasion of his visit to Edinburgh in 1822.

The King’s outfit of kilt, bonnet, brilliantly-buttoned jacket, ornamental dagger et al was completed by a set of salmon-pink tights worn beneath the kilt, a feature that was soon abandoned, but is surely due for a comeback?

This outfit, too, became an adopted image, an image with a meaning for Scots and for the outside world. Another colleague (and you must now be imagining that the University of Glasgow carries a rather disputatious crew!), Alan Riach, who is Professor of Scottish Literature describes:

“... a situation where the “real” nature of Scottish culture had become ‘... invisible in the sense that many of its major artists, composers and writers were exiled from their own national identity and became bulwarks of the British establishment’ and at the same time replaced by a series of stereotypes: ‘Perhaps the best example is one of the most famous photographs ever taken: of John Brown, standing just to the left of Queen Victoria (who is on horseback)... the image of John Brown presents the features that were to hold sway (and in some respects,

The Tree Of Liberty

Heard ye o’ the tree o’ France,
I watna what’s the name o’ t’;
Around the tree the patriots dance,
Weel Europe kens the fame o’ t’.
It stands where ance the Bastile stood,
A prison built by kings, man,
When Superstition’s hellish brood
Kept France in leading-strings, man.

Upo’ this tree there grows sic fruit,
Its virtues a’ can tell, man;
It raises man aboon the brute,
It maks him ken himsel, man.
Gif ance the peasant taste a bit,
He’s greater than a lord, man,
And wi’ the beggar shares a mite
O’ a’ he can afford, man

Let Britain boast her hardy oak,
Her poplar and her pine, man,
Auld Britain ance could crack her joke,
And o’er her neighbours shine, man
But seek the forest round and round,
And soon ’twill be agreed, man,
That sic a tree can not be found
’Twixt London and the Tweed, man.

Without this tree, alake this life
Is but a vale o’ wo, man;
A scene o’ sorrow mixed wi’ strife,
Nae real joys we know, man.
We labour soon, we labour late,
To feed the titled knave, man;
And a’ the comfort we’re to get,
Is that ayont the grave, man.

Wi’ plenty o’ sic trees, I trow,
The world would live in peace, man;
The sword would help to mak a plough,
The din o’ war wad cease, man.
Like brethren in a common cause,
We’d on each other smile, man;
And equal rights and equal laws
Wad gladden every isle, man.

still do): a dour, serious expression suggests the conscience and determination of the set of his character, staring straight at the camera: a direct man, without subtlety or humour. The seriousness, to us, seems at odds with and yet part of his self-important costume: the bonnet, the kilt and the outlandish sporrán.”

Riach sees this image as representative of: “...the disintegration of the national culture in the project of British Imperialism”. Thus the rough edges of our culture, including the uncomfortable insights of genius, could be tamed and framed as a series

of rustic curiosities. The Scots language could be portrayed as a historic relic, or a sign of backwardness, a mark of the lower classes, its currency as a vital literary language undermined.

The generations after Burns gave little consideration to his persistent return to Scots as the medium for his finest work, of his steely determination to pursue his craft in the most difficult circumstances. His fallible humanity in respect of womankind became glorified as an excuse for the misogyny of the all-male drinking club.

The icon, “Burns the Man”, the “lad who was born in Kyle” supplied the feet of clay for the Poet. Above all we were reminded – we’re Scots, let’s not get above ourselves. These attitudes obscured the significance and universality of the Poet. Here is an extract from Burns’ poem “The Tree of Liberty” (see panel)

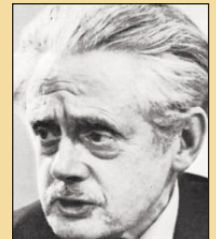
This breath of poetic fresh air is worth fighting for. This association of the real, material world with idealism, a humanist vision of the possibility of change and of the fruits of change, this is worth fighting for.

Hugh MacDiarmid (pictured) identifies the process as “Revolutions in the dynasty o’ live ideals” and in his poem “By Wauchopeside”, suggests that we can catch a glimpse of it “like a louch look in a lassie’s een.”

Today, Burns’ legacy is still contested, still misappropriated, so let us celebrate and assert a more truthful image, let’s rescue the Poet from the embrace of mediocrity and mendacity. Perhaps we can only catch a glimpse of the totality of the significance of his work as part of the “Revolution in the dynasty o’ live ideals”, but however tantalising, the glimpse is still necessary and enriching.

So, to propose a toast in the spirit of causing as much trouble as possible to the dealers in half-truths, intellectual spivs, racists, apologists for imperialism and peddlers of superstition, I propose a toast to the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns.

Bill Sweeney is Professor of Music at Glasgow University. He writes in his personal capacity.



Robert Burns' Internationalism

By Alex Davidson

One of the acid tests of a progressive then as now is support for the struggle in other countries, even if it is against your own government. Robert Burns was one of those and he was not just an internationalist in the abstract

In Burns' day with the American Revolution and War of Independence, America fought Britain and Burns supported it. And then in 1789 came the French Revolution with Britain soon at war against France. Burns, despite intimidation and pressure, supported France.

American War of Independence 1776-1783

Burns unequivocally supported the Americans against his own government. George Washington, Comm-

ander in Chief of the American Forces and first President of the United States of America was toasted by Burns in his 'Ode for George Washington's Birthday'. Burns wrote, in reference to George III,

"See gathering thousands, while I sing
A broken chain exulting bring
And dash it in a tyrant's face."

And in his 'Ballad of the American War', he sarcastically wrote:

"And did nae less in full Congress
Than quite refuse our law, man."

At the same time as showing his support for the American revolutionaries he expressed sympathy with the

enslaved Africans taken to the Americas.

This was at a time when Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies, could state, "We cannot allow the Colonies to check or discourage in any degree a traffic (slave trade) so beneficial to the nation."⁽¹⁾

Burns sympathy with the enslaved Africans was reflected in his poignant song, 'The Slave's Lament.' (see panel).

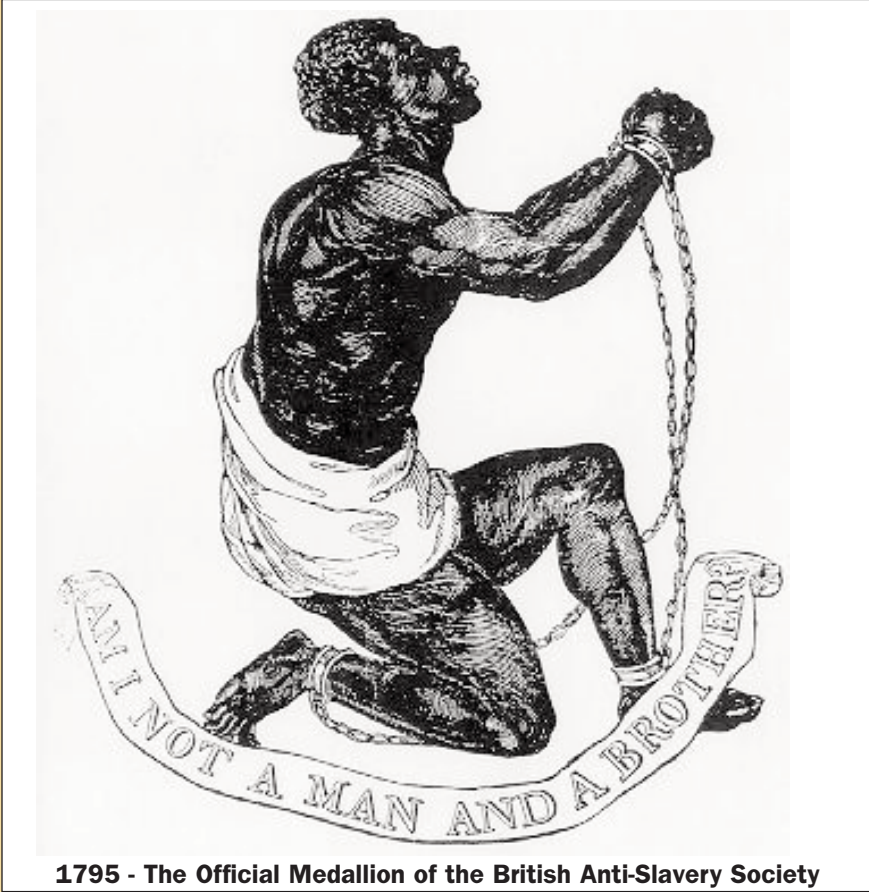
Not long after the loss of her American colonies, Britain took the Cape of Good Hope from the Dutch in 1795. The interior of Southern Africa between 20 and 30 degrees latitude south was actively promoted as a new home for "loyal Americans" and other settlers.

The Slave's Lament⁽²⁾

It was in sweet Senegal that my foes
did me enthral,
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:
Torn from that lovely shore, and must
never see it more;
And alas! I am weary, weary O.

All on that charming coast is no bitter
snow and frost,
Like the lands of Virginia, ginia, O:
There streams for ever flow, and there
flowers for ever blow,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:
There streams for ever flow, and there
flowers for ever blow,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:

The burden I must bear, while the cruel
scourge I fear,
In the lands of Virginia, ginia, O;
And I think on friends most dear, with
the bitter, bitter tear,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:
And I think on friends most dear, with
the bitter, bitter tear,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:



1795 - The Official Medallion of the British Anti-Slavery Society

French Revolution 1789

The French Revolution of 1789 took place when Burns was 30 years of age. It fanned the flames of political reform in Britain. Secret societies were formed to support the French.

The Society of Friends of the People was formed in Edinburgh in July 1792.

The year before, Part I of Thomas Paine's "Rights of Man" had been published and when Part II was published in February 1792, Paine was indicted for treason. The book was banned and an estimated 200,000 were sold.

Burns had become a Customs and Excise Officer and transferred to Dumfries in 1790. In 1792 he captured the smuggling schooner "Rosamund". When the contents of the "Rosamund" came up for auction, Burns paid £4 for 3 carronades (short cannons made in the Carron Iron Works). These he sent to the Revolutionary Government in France. So, his internationalism was more than words.

The Excise Commissioners summoned Burns on a charge of having a "leaning towards democracy".

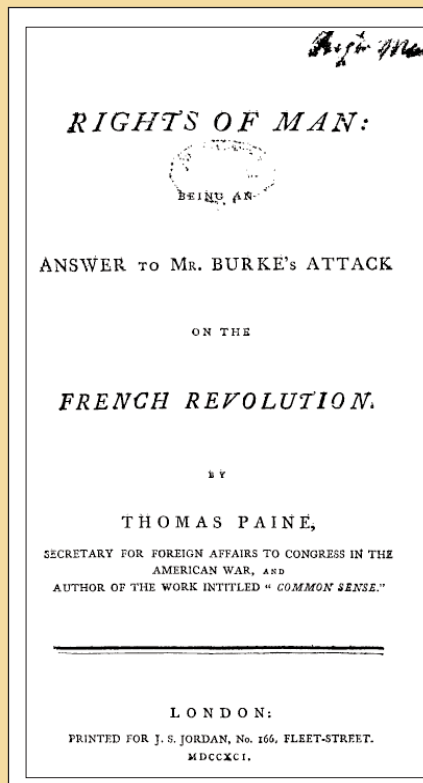
At the same time, the Glasgow advocate, Thomas Muir, was active in establishing Societies of the Friends of the People and he played a leading role at the first General Convention of the Friends of the People in Edinburgh in December 1792.



Thomas Muir

Against some opposition he read the statement from the "United Irishmen" to the Convention.

In 1793 Muir was arrested on charges of sedition but released on bail. He travelled to Paris whilst on bail and met Thomas Paine and Dr William Maxwell, Burns' doctor. He



Thomas Paine

returned to a witchhunt and at his trial was sentenced to 14 years transportation to Australia, which was thought to end in certain death.

The judge at Muir's trial, the notorious Lord Braxfield, worked on the basis that you "Hang a thief when he is young and he'll no steal when he's auld".

One commentator, Lord Cockburn, characterised Braxfield as follows: "Party politics, Scotch Law and obscenity were the full range of his conversation and of his thoughts. Every hour of his life not occupied by professional business was devoted to claret, whist and less pure enjoyment".

On the basis of Muir having agitated for enlargement of the franchise he said to the jury: "Mr Muir might have known that no attention could be paid to such a rabble. What right had they to representation? ... A Government ... should be just like a corporation, and in this country it is made up of the landed interest, which alone has a right to be represented."

So Muir was sentenced to 14 years transportation. Due to the popularity of the cause and Muir's martyrdom the Authorities had to move him to London where he was held in a ship's hulk at Woolwich along with the Reverend Palmer, who had also been sentenced, before setting sail for

Australia.⁽³⁾

In the month that Muir was sentenced Burns wrote in "From Esopus to Maria":

"The shrinking Bard adown the alley
skulks
And dreads a meeting worse than
Woolwich hulks
Though there his heresies in Church
and State
Might well award him Muir and
Palmer's fate."

The witchhunt, which had led to Muir's transportation, had subsided somewhat by 1794 when Burns, in a letter to Mrs Dunlop⁽⁴⁾, re-affirmed his view of the French Revolution. In a reference to the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, he wrote, "I cannot approve of ... whining over the deserved fate of a certain pair of personages. What is there in the delivering over of a perjured blockhead and an unprincipled prostitute to the hands of the hangman, that it should arrest for a moment, attention, in an eventful hour, when as my friend Roscoe in Liverpool gloriously expresses it:

'When the Welfare of millions is hung
in the scale
And the balance yet trembles with
fate.'

Continued on page 22

Burns: the Master of Political Song

By Jim Tait

“Ploughman poet” is probably the most popular description of Robert Burns throughout the world.

He certainly pushed a plough and he certainly was a poet as his wonderful work - *To A Mouse, On Turning Her Up In Her Nest With The Plough* (1785) - testifies.

As the title states, Burns' inspiration for *To A Mouse* was when he disturbed a mouse while ploughing on his family's farm at Mossgiel in south east Ayrshire. Yes he was a ploughman, yes he was a poet; but that description tells less than half the story of Burns' genius.

Of the 559 works that make up the 'official' complete works of Burns, some 368, or 65%, are songs.

That number shows that Burns was foremost a lyricist and arguably the greatest Scottish lyricist of all time. And his songs of life, love and liberty! live on in the music of today. His song, *Auld Lang Syne* is sung by millions all over the world every year as the old year passes and the new one begins.

In Scotland in the latter part of the 18th century he was Bob Dylan and John Lennon all rolled into one: in my opinion his poesy found its finest expression when he put it to music.

There is always an exception to every opinion and Burns' poem, *Tam O' Shanter* is my own exception to my own opinion. It is music-less and it is magnificent.

If you wish to hear one of the best renditions of *Tam O'Shanter*, by Edith Findlay, see page 22 for details of a CD which Edith, Marilyn Crawford and I produced especially for the 250th anniversary year of Burns' birth. Edith says *Tam O'Shanter* is, “a unique poem which tells a story that is vivid, colourful, humorous, spooky and any other description you wish to use ... and it is brilliant.”

So Burns was a songwriter and collector of old Scots folk songs. But how good a musician, fiddle player and singer he was we can only guess. That he had a wonderful ear for music and a natural gift for putting words to

music requires no guess work whatsoever: the Burns' canon of songs not only survives, it positively thrives. Linn Records of Glasgow have completed a landmark recording - *The Complete Songs of Robert Burns* - containing all 368 songs in a volume of 12 CDs. Around a hundred singers and musicians were involved in that project led by Dr. Fred Freeman.

However, as a composer of tunes and melodies, Scotland's 'national

bard' would, by today's litigious standards, be regarded as an out and out plagiarist.

For his genius was not as a composer of new melodies, but as someone who breathed new life into existing ones, usually old fiddle tunes, by setting new lyrics to old songs.

And in so doing he single-handedly saved hundreds of old Scots songs and tunes from extinction (See *Immortal Memory*, Page 14).

Take just one example: his most famous song, *Auld Lang Syne* (see panel). The first reference to *Auld Lang Syne* by Burns was on 17th December 1788, in a letter to his friend, Mrs Dunlop: “... Two veterans of the 'men of the world' would have met with little more heart-workings than two old hacks worn out on the road. Apropos, is not the Scotch phrase *Auld lang syne* exceedingly expressive? There is an old song and tune which has often thrilled through my soul. You know I am an enthusiast in old Scotch songs. ... Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment! ...”

The origins of *Auld Lang Syne* - old kindness - can be traced back to 1527 and the anonymous ballad of *Auld Kyndness Foryett*. Two hundred years later it was still very much alive and kicking and being re-worked by Scottish and English poets and songsters. It had many incarnations long before Burns worked his magic on it.

In the Scots poet, Allan Ramsay's publication, *The Tea-Table Miscellany* of 1727, *Auld Lang Syne* appears as a song about soldiers returning home from war.

Here is the first stanza of that version of *Auld Lang Syne* which was published over 30 years before Burns was born:

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
Tho they return with scars?
These are the noble hero's lot,
Obtain'd in glorious wars:

If *Auld Lang Syne's* lyrics had many manifestations, then the tune also had

Auld Lang Syne (1788)

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!

Chorus.
For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint stowp!
And surely I'll be mine!
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

Chorus

We twa hae run about the braes,
And pou'd the gowans fine;
But we've wander'd mony a weary fit,
Sin' auld lang syne.

Chorus

We twa hae paid'd in the burn,
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
Sin' auld lang syne.

Chorus

And there's a hand, my trusty fiere!
And gie's a hand o' thine!
And we'll tak a right gude-willie waught
For auld lang syne.

Chorus

its alternatives. Writing in September 1793, to one of his two main song publishing collaborators, George Thomson, Burns acknowledges this, "The air is but mediocre [not the tune to which it is now sung]; but the following song, the old song of olden times, & which has never been in print, nor even in manuscript, until I took it down from an old man's singing; is enough to recommend any air ..."

Auld Lang Syne, "the old song of olden times" which Burns said was "heaven-inspired" was clearly one of his favourites and one on which he worked many hours perfecting his version.

As for the air he writes about to Thomson, musical scholars of Burns' work, including the American Serge Hovey, have also unearthed that the tune to which *Auld Lang Syne* is sung as a New Year's anthem throughout the English-speaking world, is not the tune Burns favoured but was one which Thomson chose.

"The old song of olden times" is the one Burns knew and was faithfully reproduced by his other main musical collaborator, James Johnson, the publisher of the Scots Musical Museum.

That original tune can be heard on the Linn Records, *The Complete Songs of Robert Burns*, Volume 3, Track 4 *Auld Lang Syne* sung by Ronnie Browne, formerly of the Corries and by myself on the aforementioned CD with Edith Findlay and Marilyn Crawford.

The fact that *Auld Lang Syne* has become a New Year's anthem around the world is testament to the song's expression of universal and everlasting friendship and humanity.

Burns biographers and experts of all ideological persuasions over the past 250 years have variously sought to canonise or condemn him or use him to condone or oppose this or that moral or political position.

Burns was a writer and collector of bawdy - some would say pornographic - songs, as a reading of the *Merry Muses of Caledonia* shows. He called them songs of "houghmagandie"- fornication - which he acknowledged were, "not quite ladies' reading."

Early male biographers of Burns tried in vain to clean-up and bury this 'laddish' side of the man and his muse. Later biographers such as Catherine Carswell were less forgiving.

As his fondness for "houghma-

A Man's A Man for A' That (1795)

Is there for honest Poverty
That hings his head, an' a' that;
The coward slave-we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, an' a' that.
Our toils obscure an' a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The Man's the gowd for a' that.

What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin grey, an' a' that;
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine;
A Man's a Man for a' that:
For a' that, and a' that,
Their tinsel show, an' a' that;
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that.

Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that;
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coof for a' that:
For a' that, an' a' that,
His ribband, star, an' a' that:
The man o' independent mind
He looks an' laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an' a' that;
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Gude faith, he maunna fa' that!
For a' that, an' a' that,
Their dignities an' a' that;
The pith o' sense, an' pride o' worth,
Are higher rank than a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may,
(As come it will for a' that,)
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the
earth,
Shall bear the gree, an' a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That Man to Man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that.

gandie" in his rhymes and his real life bears testament, Burns had many sides to his character: multiple Burns.

At one moment he could craft a song of tender love and longing - *Ae fond Kiss* - and at another, he could pen one of obscenity - *Gie the Lass Her Farin'*.

He took many old Scots bawdy songs and crafted them into new gems of love, kindness and humanity. The song, *John Anderson My Jo*, is a case in point. Burns was 30 years of age

when he penned this song of love in old age.

Again it is an auld Scots song which appears in the "Merry Muses". It is a coarse and bawdy lyric in which a wife complains about her aged husband's lack of sexual performance. Burns transforms it into one of his most tender and moving ballads:

John Anderson, my jo, John,
When we were first acquent;
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonie brow was brent;
But now your brow is beld, John,
Your locks are like the snaw;
But blessings on your frosty pow,
John Anderson, my jo.

And just as in his attitudes to women, Burns' attitudes to the politics of his time have equally been fought over down through the years.

His support for Scottish independence - *Such A Parcel of Rogues In a Nation* - his alleged Jacobitism and support for a Scottish King sit beside his undoubted republicanism and radicalism which he conveys in his song *A Man's a Man For A' That*. (see panel) Once more we see the multiple Burns and in today's febrile Scottish politics - in which we have the first ever nationalist government - Burns' life, legacy and politics are a veritable battleground.

Burns wrote hundreds of songs on the subjects of "love and wine" but he went to great lengths to continue the proud and ancient tradition of political song that continues to thrive. Today, Glasgow Caledonian University's Centre for Political Song is not only a library of political songs, it also stages concerts dedicated to the art.

The list of Burns' political songs is huge and it would be no exaggeration to claim that he was a master.

Ye Jacobites by Name, the Battle of Killlicrankie, MacPherson's Farewell, The Slave's Lament, A Parcel of Rogues In a Nation, Song Compos'd In August (Westlin' Winds) to name but a few are all political song commentaries, often intertwined with "love and wine", on the big political events of Burns' time.

Old fiddle tunes he heard, or played on his own fiddle, old lyrics he heard his kinfolk and acquaintances singing were all grist to Burns musical mill.

He collected all of these scraps and re-worked them into new songs about his abhorrence of slavery, his contempt for the aristocracy and even the gratuitous slaughter of animals during

the "Glorious 12th".

Concerning any doubts as to Robert Burns' humanity and his republican, radical and yes revolutionary sympathies, his song, *A Man's A Man For A' That*, (see panel on page 21) written a year before he died, should, I believe, dispel most of them.

"Rights Of Man" by the revolutionary Thomas Paine was a best seller and Burns was both reader and admirer. (see page 19). *A Man's a Man* is Burns' paean of praise to "Rights Of Man".

In a letter about a *A Man's A Man For A' That* to George Thomson in January 1795, Burns wrote, "A great critic (Aikin) on songs says that love and wine are the exclusive themes for songwriting. The following is on neither subject, and consequently is no

song; but will be allowed, I think, to be two or three pretty good prose thoughts, inverted into ryhme ..."

The revolutionary "prose thoughts" were Paine's and the revolutionary "rhymes" were Rab's. What a combination - what a song!

Canonise or condemn him if you wish, but what nobody can deny is that the strong and continuous strain and spirit that spread through his life and especially his songs, was his humanity and his opposition to tyranny and oppression.

That immortal spirit of Robert Burns that lives on today and is celebrated every January around the world is captured in the slogan of the French Revolution he so admired and supported, "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité."

Robert Burns' Internationalism

Continued from page 19

The Tree of Liberty

During the Revolution the French put up poles decorated and garlanded in their town squares and called them "Trees of Liberty". Sympathisers in Britain imitated them.

In one of his late poems, *The Tree of Liberty*, Burns was not afraid to point to the gains of revolution in another country (See panel page 17).

"Like brethern in a common cause,
We'd on each other smile, man;
And equal rights and equal laws
Would gladden every isle, man."

A Man's a Man for a' that

During Burns' lifetime there were two very big international events, the American and French Revolutions. Both countries found themselves at war with Britain. Robert Burns, despite the intimidation, savage reprisals and witchhunting atmosphere in Britain, stood at one with the American and French revolutionaries against the British government.

His song, *A Man's a Man for a' that*, has become something of an internationalist anthem. It begins by asserting that there is no shame in honest poverty and ends with the triumphant, optimistic and internationalist affirmation:

"For a' that an' a' that
It's coming yet for a' that
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brothers be for a' that."

FOOTNOTES:

(1) "The years 1791-1800 had seen the British slave trade at its most grandiose – nearly 400,000 slaves had been landed from about 1340 voyages" (Hugh Thomas, "The Slave Trade", p540, London, Picador, 1997).

(2) Senegal was captured by the British from the French in 1758.

(3) Muir survived the 3 month voyage to Australia and 18 months later escaped on an American ship, the "Otter". He finally reached France in 1798 after a trip involving various stops including imprisonment in Cuba. He was welcomed as a hero of the French Revolution.

(4) Burns wrote more letters to Mrs Frances Dunlop than any other correspondent but she took offence to this particular letter and did not reply nor to several others before relenting and writing to Burns on his death-bed.

TO THE IMMORTAL MEMORY OF ROBERT BURNS

Marilyn Crawford, Edith Findlay and Jim Tait perform some of the best-known and well-loved songs and poems of Robert Burns.



EDITH FINDLAY

JIM TAIT

MARILYN CRAWFORD

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. YE JACOBITES BY NAME J Tait (4.08) 2. SWEET AFTON M Crawford (3.30) 3. TO A MOUSE E Findlay (2.25) 4. THE SLAVE'S LAMENT M Crawford (2.35) 5. TREE OF LIBERTY E Findlay (4.06) 6. A MAN'S A MAN FOR A' THAT J Tait (3.37) 7. ADDRESS TO THE UNCO GUID E Findlay (3.07) 8. CA' THE YOWES TO THE KNOWES M Crawford (3.41) 9. TO A LOUSE E Findlay (2.24) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. SONG COMPOSED IN AUGUST J Tait (5.20) 11. JAMIE COME TRY ME M Crawford (1.16) 12. JOHN ANDERSON MY JO M Crawford (1.27) 13. MAN WAS MADE TO MOURN E Findlay (4.31) 14. SUCH A PARCEL OF ROGUES ... J Tait (4.16) 15. AE FOND KISS M Crawford (3.05) 16. OF A' THE AIRTS THE WIND ... J Tait (1.50) 17. TAM O' SHANTER E Findlay (12.09) 18. AULD LANG SYNE J Tait (4.16) |
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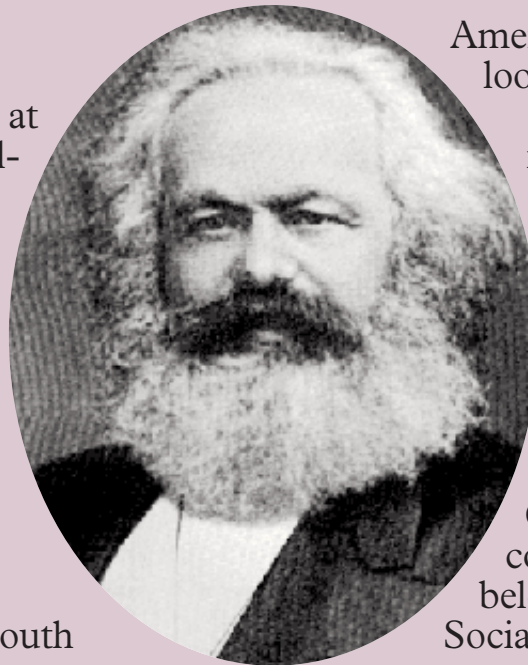
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Israel: anything the US will not support?

As the Israeli Defence Force continues to bomb Gaza, Palestinians have been given very little reason to expect any change in US policy towards Israel.

TOM BERNEY reports on the depressing signs from America.

In an interview on ABC TV, former Vice Presidential candidate and current ideological doyen of the Republican Party, Sarah Palin was asked for her views on the Middle East.

No comments at all on America's illegal wars - her reply was just, "Israel should be allowed to build more settlements." Her interviewer asked, "Even if they are on Palestinian territory?" Palin looked blank for a moment, as clearly the idea of Palestinians having

territory or rights had never crossed her mind. She responded "Israel has to build homes for their people." Satisfied with that, the interviewer moved on to another topic.

Such is the level of discussion in the United States on the continuation of the slow motion genocide of Palestine that shames the world.

Sadly it is not just Palin and her supporters. Barack Obama was elected with great expectations. Despite his airy

rhetoric in Egypt in June 2009 about a new beginning, "the situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable" and on settlements that, "there can be no progress towards peace without a halt to such construction", building and expansion of settlements has continued.

Just three weeks after Hillary Clinton had praised Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu "for showing unprecedented restraint in settlement growth" nine hundred new houses were approved for Jewish occupation in Israeli occupied East Jerusalem. There is nothing new in that. The Israelis have consistently used the ploy of promising to freeze settlements while in fact continuing to expand them.

That, of course, is presently combined with their shameless project of evicting thousands of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem. Indeed Netanyahu openly boasted about it on the steps of Downing Street in declaring that, contrary to UN resolutions, Jerusalem's status as the capital of Israel was non-negotiable.

Beside him UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown shuffled uncomfortably and muttered about 'useful discussions'. It is, therefore, no wonder that Palestinians have become disenchanted with President Obama's "more of the same" administration.

Professor Haidar Eid of Gaza recently published a bitter open letter to Obama in the Palestinian Chronicle, "About six months after your election, you gave a speech in Cairo, addressed to the Arab and Islamic worlds; which some people found impressive. I found it impressive in form, but not in substance because your actions have not matched your rhetoric. Why did I not buy the new language of the new American administration? Because while you were giving your speech, we were burying my neighbour, a terminally ill patient, who needed treatment in a hospital abroad, since, thanks to the siege imposed by your own administration and Israel on the Gaza Strip, the facilities that would have saved his life are not available in Gaza. Like more than 400 terminally ill people in Gaza, my neighbour lost his life. In spite of the fine



Arabic words of peace, "salaam aleikum," you made it crystal clear that the point of reference in any negotiations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is Israel's security. By doing that, Mr. President, you are effectively marginalizing the whole issue of Palestine, and unfortunately setting the stage for renewed Israeli assaults against a starving Gaza, an entity that has, thanks to your "unbreakable" ties with Israel, been transformed into the largest concentration camp on Earth."

Most of the world was delighted to see the back of George Bush and the election of a new President with a Democratic Party majority in both Houses of the US legislature, but it was probably naive to think that US foreign policy in relation to Israel would significantly change.

Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic Party leader, is a good example. Israel's continuous three week onslaught on Gaza in January 2009 in which hundreds of bombing raids by F16 fighter bombers, Apache gunships, artillery, tanks and a naval bombardment were launched against the virtually defenceless one and a half million people crammed into one of the poorest and most densely packed areas on earth made thousands homeless and incinerated children with illegal phosphorous shells.

A UN statement condemned the attack saying Israel "committed actions amounting to war crimes, and possibly crimes against humanity" ... as the Israeli operations ... "were carefully planned in all their phases as a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorise a civilian population."

Israel is refusing to cooperate with an investigation into its actions. It is expected that the Obama administration will veto any attempt by the UN Security Council to refer the matter to the International Criminal Court.

Pelosi and the Democratic Party's response was to pass a resolution defending Israel, calling "on all nations ... to lay blame both for the breaking of the calm and for subsequent civilian casualties in Gaza precisely where blame belongs, that is, on Hamas."

She even redefined international law by declaring it acceptable for any nation to kill large numbers of civilians if it could claim the other side initiated the conflict.

Indeed the Democrat's resolution went even further than Bush! He and Condoleezza Rice had, at least, supported the initial UN resolution condemning "All acts of violence and terror directed against civilians" Pelosi condemned only Hamas. Her resolution



also congratulated Israel for having "facilitated humanitarian aid to Gaza."

Despite the fact that the International Committee of the Red Cross had reported precisely the opposite - that the Israelis had actively obstructed help for the injured, "The ICRC/PRCS team found four small children next to their dead mothers in one of the houses. They were too weak to stand up on their own. One man was also found alive, too weak to stand up. In all there were at least 12 corpses lying on mattresses. In another house, the ICRC/PRCS rescue team found 15 other survivors of the attack including several wounded. In yet another house, they found an additional three corpses. Israeli soldiers posted at a military position some 80 meters away from this house ordered the rescue team to leave the area which they refused to do. There were several other positions of the Israel Defense Forces nearby as well as two tanks."

"This is a shocking incident," said Pierre Wettach, the ICRC's head of delegation for Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. "The Israeli military must have been aware of the situation but did not assist the wounded. Neither did they make it possible for us or the Palestine Red Crescent to assist the wounded." The Israeli army had prevented ambulances entering so the ICRC eventually had to evacuate children and the wounded on donkey carts.

The Israeli Defence Force also deliberately delayed access to other areas where wounded families were huddling in shattered buildings. 1,400 Palestinians were killed and thousands more wounded. The ICRC issued a statement saying: "The ICRC believes

that in this instance the Israeli military failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded. It considers the delay in allowing rescue services access unacceptable"

The Obama and Pelosi administration's attitude is a very marked contrast to former President Jimmy Carter's reaction. He visited Gaza in the aftermath of the onslaught. He said he had to hold back tears when he saw the extent of human misery there and said the Palestinians "are treated like animals."

Visiting the American School in Gaza, damaged in Israel's three-week operation, Mr Carter said, "it's very distressing to me". He said the school had been "deliberately destroyed by bombs from F-16s made in my country and delivered to the Israelis".

Mr Carter also criticised Israel's blockade of the Strip, which prevents all but humanitarian basics entering Gaza and extends to a ban on virtually all building materials. "Gazans are treated more like animals than human beings ... Never before in history has a large community like this been savaged by bombs and missiles and then been deprived of the means to repair itself," he said.

And that situation is continuing. So while Netanyahu and Palin wring their hands and claim the Israelis must not be deterred from building new homes for their expansion of illegal settlements tens of thousands of Palestinians are condemned to spend the winter in tents or inadequate shelters scavenged from the wreckage of their former homes.

They are denied not only the materi-

Gaza under Israeli Blockade - June 2009

- 40% unemployed
- 750,000 receive UNRWA food aid
- No petrol or diesel since Nov. 2008 (except UN)
- Recently blocked items: light bulbs, candles, matches, books, musical instruments, crayons, clothing, shoes, mattresses, sheets, blankets, tea, coffee, chocolate, nuts
- Virtually no building materials allowed in.

Source: UNRWA and World Bank

als to rebuild them, but also access to the basic necessities of sustenance. Their only lifeline is the tunnel network to Egypt. Imports through the tunnels are thought to account for about 80% of Gaza's economy.

Tunnels are their only means of obtaining the essentials - from food, to fuel, to even newsprint paper for their newspapers - that are embargoed by the

Israeli blockade. The list of embargo items is entirely at the whim of the Israel occupation. Even Senator John Kerry was moved to protest at the extent of the embargo when he noted that even pasta (!) was refused entry.

At the time of writing the Israeli Air Force has just bombed Gaza and killed more Palestinians on the pretext of destroying the tunnels. The Israeli embargo and the bombings are clearly much more to do with the continued suppression and demoralisation of the Palestinian people than with any realistic security considerations.

Jimmy Carter and John Kerry can see that. Wouldn't it be refreshing if President Obama actually displayed some justification for his Nobel Peace Prize by actually doing something about it rather than continuing his predecessors' traditional reluctance to antagonise the US's grotesquely influential Zionist lobby?

Every US president for 30 years has asked the Israelis to stop building settle-



ments. But they have all continued to support Israel when they refused to do so.

Bill Clinton in frustration with his powerlessness against Netanyahu once remarked "Who the F*** does he think he is! Who is the F***** super power here!" I expect Barack Obama might feel much the same after his recent humiliations. The question is - will he find the answers? Or will he just give us more on his country's "unbreakable ties with Israel"?

UK elections are seriously out of favour

Continued from page 10

General Election in as good a position as it is possible to be given all his travails since becoming Prime Minister in June 2007. He should also go into the election with his party as together as it is possible to be due to Mandelson's influence among the increasingly marginalised Blairites.

For the Tories, Europe is still the issue that may see them haemorrhage votes in their heartlands to the anti-EU, anti-immigration UK Independence Party (UKIP). UKIP came second in the EU elections last June and they have a new leader, former Tory peer, old Etonian and insurance millionaire, Malcolm Everard MacLaren Pearson - Baron Pearson of Rannoch - who owns a 12,000 acres estate in Scotland.

Immediately following his election, Baron Pearson called on the Tories to hold a referendum on the EU's Lisbon Treaty - which came into force on 1 December 2009 - and said he'd disband UKIP if they did.

How much success UKIP will have under its new, capricious and very right wing leader, is uncertain. In 2005 UKIP failed to make any decisive inroads in Tory heartlands and it could very well be the same outcome again as Euro-sceptic Tory voters are forced to weigh-up what is most important to them: getting Labour out or having another kick at the EU.

My bet is that the closer the General Election comes the more those Tory Euro-sceptics who voted for UKIP in June will drift back to the fold, swayed by the inevitable message that voting UKIP again would be a waste of their vote: the classic two main parties' squeeze message.

Labour will employ the same squeeze message in Scotland against the Scottish National Party whose leader and Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond predicted his party would increase its number of MPs at Westminster from six to 20. He also postulated that the outcome of the General Election could be a hung par-

liament and that with 20 MPs, the SNP could hold the balance of UK power.

These claims, made before their dismal result in Glasgow North East, now seem like fantasy and there is every likelihood they will be squeezed out by Labour whose key message will be that, unlike the Scottish Parliament, Westminster is a two-horse race between Labour and the Tories.

The SNP will also be disappointed that after nearly three years in Government, their flagship policy of independence is, according to the latest poll, opposed by 60% of Scots.

For Labour, the SNP is not the threat it was when Brown first became Prime Minister and for the Tories, UKIP and the EU are unlikely to be the burning issue they were in June.

It really is, "Game On" between Labour and the Tories. For those of us who would prefer not to choose between Tory cuts or Labour cuts but between fundamentally different programmes - socialism vs capitalism - we will, I'm afraid, be sorely disappointed.

Romania: life after the counter-revolution

Romanian university professors and media folk I met showed as little enthusiasm for capitalism as for former president Ceaucescu.

PHIL CHAMBERS spent three days in Iasi in Romania. He reports on life there after two decades of capitalism.

With a gesture that reminded me of the famous Monty Python 'Life of Brian' sketch, 'What Have the Romans Ever Done For Us?', one pointed admiringly to his shelves of good-quality, affordable art books published in the socialist period.

The daughter of a doctor told me that for most people the health system is worse under capitalism. Gypsies look like one potential scapegoat for the negative impact of not-so-free market economics, including the opportunity for young people to work for low wages abroad.

Church attendance is up. The last time I saw this many nuns and priests was in the Vatican (it's a living). The surprisingly large number of stray dogs look well-fed (better-fed than the beggars, at any rate) and some even use zebra crossings.

Since imperialism wants Romania and other smaller former socialist countries as a convenient source of cheap labour, its EU membership is a mixed blessing.

Public sector workers are feeling the pinch and fighting back: the day before I arrived there was a widespread strike. After 20 years the 1989 'revolution' feels much more like the counter-revolution it really was.

Public sector workers are feeling the pinch and fighting back: the day before I arrived there was a widespread strike.

This was never going to be fast forward to capitalist prosperity. Even if the clunkily cruciform monument to the events in 1989, between the Palace of Culture and the oldest (renovated) church of St Nicholas, was meant to look inhumanly abstract, it now looks tatty as well, as if no-one really believes in or cares about it.

At least all the other monuments in the city are figurative, and in Orthodox Christianity, which has the strongest

following in Romania, abstract symbols are never detached from the images of people which, as icons, are credited with a kind of life of their own.

All of which makes the 1989 monument look oddly out of place. Critics of socialism (or of Ceaucescu) acknowledge that before 1989 there were many busy factories in and around the city which were closed down in the interests of the new capitalist order.

In the countryside, small-holders cannot afford the basic equipment - machines, fertilisers, etc. - that former co-operatives were able to during socialism by pooling resources and getting state loans or grants.

Someone joked 'At least it's all organic'. The rural workforce is ageing fast as the young seek work in the cities or abroad, which in due course will make agriculture unsustainable.

Prediction: small-holders will be forced to sell their land at low prices to capitalist enterprises thus further deepening social division. Farmland will shrink as a proportion of the total, as better-off people build villas on it instead of using it for crops or grazing.

But it seems that even the villas are being paid for on credit, so the whole ludicrous and vicious business of catering to profit rather than need risks crashing down, and the ordinary people will ultimately have to pick up the pieces.

But at least the sun was shining while I was there. One afternoon, a bunch of serious-looking old men in singlets or jackets, with not a sheet of music in sight, sat in a semicircle on a bandstand in a local park and struck up a spirited waltz or three on a wonderful assortment of rather battered trumpets, tubas, cornets and things-in-between.

And between the gentlest of showers and on the lightest of breezes, the yellow Linden-leaves fluttered down as if in time to the music. Romanians deserved a better socialism than was available in the cold war even under the relatively freewheeling Ceaucescu. Now they deserve better than capitalism, but that might not be as easy to dislodge as Linden-leaves, however hard they try.



1978: Nicolae Ceaucescu with US President Jimmy Carter, reflecting Ceaucescu's desire to distance Romania from the USSR.

The brutality of German fascism did not begin with the holocaust

By **LEO KUNTZ**. Translated by Pat Turnbull from the German journal *RotFuchs* (see panel).



1928: Hitler and Hermann Göring with SA stormtroopers - the Brownshirts - at Nuremberg.

When history is written in the Federal Republic of Germany, it is the usual practice to refer to the persecution and murder of more than six million European Jews by the fascists using the word 'holocaust'. (The Jewish victims themselves call it the Shoa.)

This expression, imported from the USA, conceals the full extent of the crimes perpetrated in the name of the German people and without any mass resistance from them. On the subject of resistance: according to the interpretation of today's Federal Republic, this

was conducted almost solely by the 'men of 20th July 1944'.

To give a true historical picture, we must guard against two falsifications of the actual events. The defenders of the Nazi past deny the extermination of millions of Jews by the Hitler fascists, or even attempt to justify it. The British Bishop Williamson, rehabilitated inside the church by the Pope, has excelled himself recently in this respect. This monstrous lie is rejected by all democrats far into the bourgeois camp. Particularly stubborn proponents are

RotFuchs

TRIBÜNE FÜR KOMMUNISTEN UND SOZIALISTEN IN DEUTSCHLAND

RotFuchs is a monthly journal in German. The journal's title means Red Fox and it describes itself as a communist-socialist journal for politics and economics, culture and science.

RotFuchs was founded in 1998; it now has a wide readership in Germany, particularly in the east, and readers in a further 36 countries. It also has a web site where the journal can be read as printed.

RotFuchs is independent of any party and relies solely on its readers for financial support; there are an increasing number of RotFuchs supporters' groups which hold discussion meetings as well as spreading the journal and organising support for it. RotFuchs can call on excellent writers on a wide range of topics. Many were active in the realms of scholarship, journalism, the armed forces, the intelligence service and other areas of social activity in the German Democratic Republic.

RotFuchs says, "What do we stand for? Our aim is socialism ... We are so old-fashioned as to hold true to the scientific socialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin in theory and practice. We mean a social order which can only be achieved as the result of unremitting class and mass struggles. Its base is the political power of those exploited by capital and social ownership of the most important means of production. ... For us the GDR remains the good Germany - not because it was without faults and blemishes but because for over 40 years it took the power and property from the bourgeois and barons. And because it helped to secure peace in Europe."

RotFuchs' editor Klaus Steiniger worked in the German Democratic Republic as a public prosecutor, mayor, television journalist and in the Foreign Ministry of the GDR. From 1967 to 1991 he was on the editorial staff and a foreign correspondent of the newspaper 'Neues Deutschland' (New Germany). He reported from many countries, including Japan and the USA, where he reported on the trial of Angela Davis.

From 1974 to 1979 he was a witness to the revolution and counter-revolution in Portugal. His own accounts of his experiences are published in 'Bei Winston und Cunhal: Reporter auf vier Kontinenten' (With Winston and Cunhal: reporter on four continents), published by edition ost, Berlin.

even confronted with the law.

There is, however, another tendency in the official media representation and writing of history in the Federal Republic of Germany: the attempt to narrow down the brutalities of German fascism to the persecution and extermination of the Jews.

Hitler's brown dictatorship directed itself first towards the brutal elimination of political opponents: communists, social democrats, bourgeois anti-fascists and principled Christians. Fascism meant the subjugation of other nationalities. An entire network of concentration camps, the murder of millions of human beings from almost every European country, the extreme exploitation of forced labourers and prisoners of war to the advantage of German concerns and landowners characterise the situation.

It is my own experience of German fascism which is always before me. I was five when, late one evening, men dragged my father Albert Kunz into the flat. His head and clothes were covered in blood. I now know that this happened on 25th May 1932. Father had been stabbed in the head with a knife while defending Wilhelm Pieck (see picture) who went on to become the first President of the German Democratic Republic] against an SA attack in the Prussian parliament.



1926: Wilhelm Pieck at a Communist Party of Germany event in Berlin.

Deeply shocked by this picture, I took in only the outrage of the grown ups and the groans of the wounded man. The next day father had disappeared. He was the organising secretary of the Communist Party of Germany leadership in Berlin and to protect him from the fascist terror the party leadership sent him as political secretary to Hesse.

It was not until a year later that I saw him again in the police prison at Langen near Frankfurt am Main, in

grey-green prisoner's clothing and smelling terribly of iodine. An experience that has never left me, above all because that was the last time I saw my father. After eleven years of uninterrupted captivity, he was beaten to death by the SS during interrogation in the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp.

But my confrontation with the reality of Nazi rule had other aspects. Shortly after the turn of the year 1932/33 – I was out with mother on a shopping trip in Mueller Street, one of the main commercial streets of Wedding [working class quarter of Berlin, called Red Wedding in a contemporary song] – we were suddenly aware of the thudding of rhythmically stamping boots.

A marching column of brown uniformed men approached bawling a song. People were jammed in at the sides of the road. I saw many fists raised threateningly. Suddenly I heard the command: 'Halt, chin-straps down, right and left, clear the street!' An orgy of beating began. Mother grabbed me and we ran into a shop. Someone showed us the back door and unprevented we found the quickest way to our flat in African Street. Saved!

A few weeks later, in March. I was on my way home from school and as usual walked through the grounds of a kindergarten. Someone I knew came running towards me shouting: 'Get

home quick, the Browns are coming!' At our flats we were greeted by loud screaming. Windows were flung open, furniture and beds were thrown out. On the paths brown uniformed men were beating people up.

Before they turned up at our home, my mother left the flat with me, carrying a suitcase, to go to the bus stop; but we were followed by SA men who had noticed us. The bus driver, who recognised our desperate situation, drove close enough for us to jump on.

Without stopping again the bus drove to the underground station. As a result of this man's courageous action we were saved. We never went back to the flat. That is how 'normal' fascism began for us. Nazi rule over Germany was characterised by the terrorist persecution of communists and other anti-fascists, by an arbitrary regime of fear. Only later did the systematic policy of extermination against Jewish fellow citizens begin. This required a further precondition: the creation of a 'consciousness' of belonging to the 'master race'.

The Nazis created a chauvinist frenzy of superiority among the mass of Germans. In doing this they could base themselves on corresponding 'traditions'. The motto in the times of the Kaiser was already: 'The world should enjoy Germanness.'

At the school I went to in 1937 I had to participate in so-called race investigations. I was classified an exemplary Aryan because of my athletic build. A 'good German' was an Aryan, superior to all 'inferior races' to which Jews, 'gypsies' and Slavs belonged, classified as 'sub-human'. And so the 'Aryans' kept quiet when in 1938 the mass persecution of the Jews began. Anyone who refutes this chronology of events under fascism does so with a purpose – to deny or devalue the resistance of communists, social-democrats and other anti-fascists. The merciless persecution of all opponents of the Nazis and the toleration of anti-semitic excesses which led to Auschwitz made the mass of Germans compliant in participating in the huge carnage which was unleashed by Hitler in 1939.

Added to this was the lie of the 'national community' to gloss over the continuing capitalist class rule. The arms drive in particular brought enormous profits to the German bosses.

Anyone who reduces German fascism to the genocide of Jews described in the word holocaust, is silent about the more far reaching barbarism of Hitler fascism: 25 million Soviet citizens, millions of Poles, Sinti and Roma were victims of that savagery. The political heralds of the Federal Republic of Germany proclaim themselves friends of 'the Jews', seeking to give the impression they have conquered the brown past, while the womb that bore it is in reality still fruitful.

For them it is not a question of 'the Jews', but only of the state of Israel, which is an aggressive and racist outpost of imperialism in the Near East. As far as we are concerned, we stand in solidarity with all the people in Israel who oppose this course.

Mittelbau Dora Concentration Camp

By Pat Turnbull.

As Leo Kuntz says (see page 29), his father Albert was killed by the SS in Mittelbau Dora Concentration Camp.

This camp had a particular character. On 17–18 August 1943, 433 RAF bombers raided Peenemuende, where the German V weapons, the V1 flying bomb and the V2 rocket, were being manufactured. Because of extensive damage, production was suspended, and a search was begun for underground caves to be used as a factory.

The place selected was near Nordhausen, in the Harz mountains, where a subterranean complex of caves, tunnels and galleries had already been built long before the war for the secret storage of war materials, poison gas and sulphuric acid. This underground site was adapted and production of the V weapons started there.

Overall responsibility for the project was held by the Minister of Armaments, Albert Speer. Scientific and technical organisation was in the hands of Wernher von Braun and his team. The code name of the project was Dora and the underground factory and adjoining concentration camp was known as Mittelbau Dora.

The adaptation of the galleries began in August 1943 and was undertaken by groups of prisoners from Buchenwald, then from other concentration camps along with prisoners just arrested.

Both in the construction work and in the subsequent weapons production, working and living conditions were horrific. There was no daylight and only the dimmest artificial light. Prisoners stayed underground for weeks working twelve to fourteen hours a day. 20,000 of the total of around 60,000 prisoners who were brought to Mittelbau Dora died.

Despite the construction of the neighbouring concentration camp, in January 1944 about 7000 prisoners still lived underground. The prisoners were from 21 different countries: 9,481 Soviet people, Poles, French, Germans, Belgians, Italians and others.

The plan was to produce 12,000 V2s in 13 months, but only 6000 were assembled and many of these were faulty. Some exploded on testing, others did not start, exploded on the launch platforms or did not reach the target.

Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint in their book 'In Total War'



1945: Supervised by American soldiers, German civilians from the town of Nordhausen bury the corpses of prisoners found at the Mittelbau Dora concentration camp in mass graves. Photo: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

(Harmondsworth 1974) say that London was hit 517 times by V2s and the rest of England 537 times, so it may well be that some of the rockets fell in the sea and others aimed for London fell elsewhere. Among other cities, particularly hard hit was Antwerp – 1,265 times.

Among the earliest prisoners to arrive at the camp were organisers of resistance from other camps. Albert Kunz was their leader. A special task was to try to sabotage production, working as slowly as possible, delaying dispatch and transport of components, assembling them incorrectly and misconnecting wires in the rockets' electrical circuits.

This was very courageous and dangerous activity. The high rate of rocket failures alerted the SS to the possibility of sabotage and to intimidate the prisoners, victims, especially young Soviet men, were hanged from jibs and gantries at the entrance to the tunnels.

Many activists were arrested and tortured before execution. Among these was Albert Kunz, beaten to death on 22 January 1945.

The Americans entered the camp on 11 April 1945 by which time most prisoners had been evacuated by the German guards, many dying in the

process. In one particular atrocity over 1000 prisoners were locked in a barn which was set on fire the next day.

The Americans removed all the rockets and installations and later captured Wernher von Braun and his team in the Bavarian Alps. Far from coming to trial, they were taken to the USA to work for the military, and were subsequently honoured for their achievements.

According to the Yalta agreement of February 1945, the Americans left the area on 1 July and the Soviet army took over. The galleries were blown up and the entrances to the tunnels solidly blocked. Mittelbau Dora, situated in what was to be the German Democratic Republic, became a Place of Remembrance and Warning, with many visitors over the years.

A monument was built there by Juergen von Woyski. In Len Crome's book 'Unbroken – Resistance and Survival in the Concentration Camps' (Lawrence and Wishart 1988), he describes the monument as 'a group of gaunt and resolute men' and adds: 'Such men never ceased to believe in ultimate liberation, worked for it and offered all resistance possible under the cruellest of circumstances'.

The Darwin discussion

Cooperation is a powerful survival trait

Deeply embedded in European folklore and literature is a fear of the wolf as a species, more so probably than any other animal.

A. B. CAIRNS argues that humans survived because they cooperated with one another.

Wolves are social animals, they hunt in packs and this makes them successful predators and our folklore records that. How could puny humans survive on the plains of Africa which they shared with stronger and faster predators?

Only by cooperating with one another. Cooperation within a species is a very powerful survival trait.

Evolution by natural selection must have favoured that trait within the human species. People who cooperated were more likely to survive and reproduce.

We are all the product of successful ancestors. As Richard Dawkins points out; "Not one of your ancestors died young. They all copulated at least once".⁽¹⁾ Evolution tells us that we must have a pre-disposition to cooperate, it is essential for the continuation of our species.

I suspect that very few of the billions of humans alive today could survive without the complex social infrastructures within which they live. Without that infrastructure not just we as individuals would perish but also everything which defines us as human.

Could we have built such structures if cooperation were not part of our natures? It could be argued that some kind of socialism is a biological imperative.

But a term like Darwinian, misused in a social context as a shorthand for a 'devil take the hindmost' view of society just illustrates an ignorance of the complexity of the science of evolution. Also it does Darwin a great disservice.

The natural sciences, physics, chemistry and biology are based upon a very rigorous methodology.⁽²⁾ Without going into detail, every assertion has to be tested. The test used and its methodology must then be capable of being repeated elsewhere by other,

independent peers.

Those peers also have to agree that the test chosen is a valid one. It is only then that the original assertion will begin to be accepted as possibly true. For this to work, terms have to be defined very precisely, everyone must know exactly what is being talked about.

When you put vinegar on your chips you don't really know what is in it but it contains some ethanoic acid. When a chemist carries out a procedure using 0.05 molar aqueous ethanoic acid solution he/she knows exactly what is being added. Darwinian is a vinegar kind of term.

"Evolution tells us that we must have a pre-disposition to cooperate, it is essential for the continuation of our species."

The outcome of the scientific process is knowledge which can be accepted as true with a fairly well defined degree of confidence. New knowledge gained in the future may lead to refinement but for now the knowledge works, it has been tested and confirmed independently. If it does not work that will become obvious and it will be rejected.⁽³⁾

Most areas of enquiry aspire to this level of rigour even where what is being examined doesn't have the homogeneity of laboratory chemicals nor are there the kinds of tools needed for precise measurement, as are available to chemists.

Sociologists for instance may struggle to gather opinions from a disparate population and they have to take the resulting uncertainty into account when considering their results. This kind of difficulty is not of course a reason to abandon scientific method, it is a reason to consider the degree of confi-

dence that can be placed in the results of any research.

Of course scientific research takes place in a social context and this can have a profound effect on what is researched and in some cases can lead to inconvenient results being suppressed.⁽⁴⁾

If an ideology, religious prejudice or commercial interest subverts the process then the resulting pseudo science can lead to very serious consequences.

In the 20th century this was well illustrated by the use of pseudo scientific intelligence tests to deny the vote to black people, the compulsory sterilisation of large numbers of the 'feeble minded' and the lobotomisation of the unruly. These things happened in many of the United States.

In the Soviet Union the pseudo scientific theories of Trofim Lyenko⁽⁵⁾ based on a rigid and distorted view of Marxist theory caused massive setbacks for Soviet agriculture over many decades.

This continued up until his denunciation before the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1964. Denunciation came because lying in science is ultimately found out. If crops don't grow as you claim they should, it shows. A religious example from the 21st century is the rejection of polio vaccination by many Muslim leaders in present day Nigeria.⁽⁶⁾

Vaccination is a western plot to undermine Islam and it spreads Aids apparently. The UN programme, aimed at eradicating polio in its last stronghold, Africa, has been halted and in fact put into reverse by the spread of polio from Nigeria to other parts of Africa.

Before we accept any idea we must ask, what is the evidence? How much confidence can be placed in that evidence? For decades vested interests have denied Global Warming. One of the tools used to do this is the fact that science cannot make 100% accurate predictions and probabilities are fairly easy to distort.

If we say that there is knowledge not

READER'S LETTER to The Socialist Correspondent

DARWINISM AND MARXISM

I agree with much of what Comrade Cairns says in his letter ('Darwin and Complexity from Simplicity') in issue No. 6, particularly in relation to the supreme importance of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. However, I think his argument is incomplete, and leaves room for a creator-God after all.

Darwin's theory only applies to the evolution of living organisms. It does not – and cannot – explain how the earliest living organisms on Earth actually arose from non-living matter. Thus, while we no longer need accept the Biblical fairy tales of a human race created directly by God, there is still a gap to be filled here, much further back in the development of life on Earth. Christians (and practitioners of other religions) who accept evolution as a reality, fill this gap with a creator-God.

Even if we gloss over this gap, there exists a problem further back in time: the origin of the Universe. Most scientists accept the Big Bang as the event that formed the Universe, but that of itself does not remove the role of the creator-God, even in the minds of some cosmologists. (Stephen Hawking comes to mind: his *A Brief History of Time* makes clear his acceptance of the existence of God.) What caused the Big Bang?

Evolution by natural selection does not, as Comrade Cairns puts it, "provide the final part to a wholly materialistic understanding of the universe." Dialectical materialism fulfils this role.

In his *Anti-Dühring*, Friedrich Engels showed how dialectical materialism made a creator-God unnecessary at any stage in the development of the Universe. One element of dialectical materialism is even starting to find acceptance in bourgeois science – and, in respect of our subject, perhaps the most telling one. In recent years, more and more scientists have started to accept what they call the law of emergence.

Simply put, this law states that, as any system becomes more complex, new laws of development arise from within it by which the system acquires further levels of complexity. Dialectical materialists will immediately recognise this as a restatement of the law of the transformation of quantity into quality – the accumulation of quantitative changes in a system eventually results in qualitative transformations.

Thus, we do not need to invoke a "creator" either at the formation of the Universe (qualitative transformation – or acquisition of a new level of complexity - in whatever existed before the Big Bang) or at the formation of the earliest living organisms on Earth from previously existing inanimate matter. Whether we ever work out precisely how these events occurred is another matter – profound qualitative transformations such as these tend to destroy the evidence, so to speak.

One of the consequences of the operation of the law of emergence is that the development of complexity within a system should accelerate as the system evolves. Once again, the transformation of quantity into quality, this time treating the accumulation of complexity itself as the quantitative change.

In terms of the evolution of life, this does away with the back door for "Creationism", intelligent design. This is predicated on the notion that humans, and other higher life forms are "too complex" to have evolved from the simplest life forms unassisted, even accepting an "old Earth", as dated by geologists, rather than by Biblical "calculations". The development of complexity in evolving living organisms was not linear, but exponential.

Leslie Masters

amenable to scientific enquiry we are saying that it is not open to being investigated. That is we must accept it as an act of faith. That gives it a religious dimension. Religion being the one area of human experience which demands to be accepted without evidence. This is just a nonsense, without some evidence it is not knowledge.

Having arrived at my materialist and atheist views because; all the evidence I have ever come across points to their validity, I must reject religion and anything else claiming to be above a requirement for evidence.

That is not to say that evidence must equate to 100% proof. I believe a well ordered socialist society would be a better place to live than a chaotic capitalist one. That belief is based on such evidence as the fact that crime rates increase as social inequality increases.

Assuming the converse is true then a socialist society will be safer. Of course this is only one factor. In the end however I do not have absolute proof and must accept that I may be wrong.

The fact that apologists for capitalism have used a theory of evolution to justify right wing 'struggle of the individual is natural', 'its all just human nature' ideas/policies and justifications, does not undermine the science, it illustrates their ignorance (possibly/probably deliberate) of the complexity of the science.

Evolutionary biology certainly does not justify a 'devil take the hindmost' politics or social practice. Genetics is not about some deterministic blueprint for an organism; it is about possibilities and probabilities relating to adaptation. Evolution could not occur if all outcomes were pre-determined.

And by the way, what Darwin certainly did not do, was justify capitalism.

FOOTNOTES:

(1) Said by Dawkins during a debate with a Rabbi - published in the *The New Yorker* (September 9, 1996)

(2) This is elementary for any science student, for those not familiar Wikipedia has a good article detailing the process.

(3) You may remember the excitement over Cold Fusion some years ago. Where is it now?

(4) Dr Ben Goldacre writes a 'Bad Science' column in the *Guardian* newspaper, much of his findings can be read at <http://www.badscience.net/>. He details many recent abuses of science

(5) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science: A critical history* by Helena Sheehan 1993 gives a concise account of the biology debate that took place in the Soviet Union in the 1920's.

(6) Martin Robbins article in *The Guardian*, Saturday August 8 2009.