

**Eyewitness in Catalonia: Dick Nichols reports on Catalonia's referendum and future**  
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**Che! 50 years on from the death of Che Guevara**  
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# Scottish Socialist Voice

## POWERFUL ELITES FEAR DEMOCRACY

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# Catalonia's referendum: a triumph for democracy built on people's power

by Dick Nichols, in Barcelona

**IS IT** possible to have a successful referendum when your country is effectively occupied by 10,000 police and paramilitaries with orders to stop it?

The holding of Catalonia's October 1 referendum on independence shows that it is: all you need is a mobilised people with a clear vision of where they are going, Europe's most powerful and persistent social movement to help guide them, and a government that's actually committed to carrying out its promises.

Add to those already rare ingredients commitment to avoiding provocations and violence, ability to improvise when logistics are sabotaged and determination to prevail in spite of all difficulties, including often severe tensions within your own camp. Then you've discovered the recipe for victory.

The people of Catalonia proved that on October 1 when, despite over 90 attacks on polling stations by Spanish National Police and the paramilitary Civil Guard and many logistical failures, over three million (57 per cent of the electoral roll) came out to vote and 2.26 million succeeded in actually doing so (and having their vote counted).

## People save referendum

The other 770,000 (figure of the Catalan government) either found their polling station sealed off or their vote being carried off in a ballot box that had been confiscated by the "forces of law and order". These had bashed their way through peaceful defence pickets.

Despite this brutal operation—whose 900 injured victims gave millions of shocked people around the world their first glimpse of the authoritarian, neo-Francoist heart of the Spanish state—the referendum organisation held up under the stress.

Its survival allowed 2.02 million Catalans to vote for independence (89.2 per cent of the counted vote), 176,500 to oppose it (7.8 per cent) and 65,700 to vote informal (2.9 per cent). In absolute terms, 2.02 million voted Yes to independence. This was an increase in the numbers wanting to say farewell to Spain



**STATE-SPONSORED VIOLENCE:** the people, including those who don't support independence, are completely outraged by the October 1 police attacks

of 158,000 since the September 9, 2014 non-binding 'participatory process' began the present phase of consultations on the issue.

Obviously, support for independence on October 1 would have been much higher if the referendum had been held in normal circumstances.

October 1 was the referendum that was never going to happen, and whose demise was announced time and again in Spanish state establishment media. Today headlines like "The Law Dismantles The Referendum" (*La Voz de Galicia*, September 21) and "[Prime Minister Mariano] Rajoy Dismantles Catalan Government's Plan B" (*El Español*, September 30) are looking very stupid.

Not that this reality has bothered Rajoy, who had been endlessly repeating that "this referendum will not take place".

Simple: on the night of October 1 he declared that what had taken place was not a referendum. Rather, it was "a mere stage show, one more episode in a strategy against democratic social harmony and legality".

So how did the referendum manage to take place? Basically because every attack from the legal system and police forces of the Spanish state was met by a counter-attack led by the Catalan government and pro-in-

dependence mass organisations—the Catalan National Assembly (ANC), the Catalan culture and language defence organisation Omnium Cultural and the Association of Municipalities for Independence (AMI).

The Catalan people responded in their hundreds and thousands to their call for mobilisation, creating a street presence that has overwhelmed expectations and is sending shudders through the Spanish establishment.

## The people vs the State

Throughout this period of rising tension even the most optimistic had moments of doubt about whether the referendum could go ahead. That it could was finally due to three key factors that the Spanish state failed to control.

The first was the disciplined and organised occupation and defence of polling stations. Up to 2000 of the 2315 polling stations were occupied from Friday, September 29, with parents and teachers putting on imaginative programs of activities for children and for themselves (like a 24-hour table tennis tournament in one location!)

This physical control of the vast majority of polling stations meant that the police (Catalan and Spanish) and the Civil Guards





**NO PASARAN:** firefighters protected voters from the Spanish police and Guardia Civil

had to decide what level of violence to use to lay their hands on the “illegal” voting material within.

The Catalan police adopted the approach of not using any physical pressure; the Spanish agencies—as is clear from the footage that the world has seen—unleashed indiscriminate violence on young and old alike.

Their effort was enough to close down 92 polling centres, and to destroy the right to vote of around 770,000 (Catalan government figure)—about 14.5 per cent of the electorate.

However, this was insufficient to invalidate the referendum completely (as international observers noted). It also came at an enormous political cost to the Spanish state’s image of a “modern European democracy”.

The second factor that escaped the control of the Spanish state’s police apparatuses was technical: the Catalan government successfully managed to have ballot boxes manufactured and delivered to nearly all polling stations.

This was a World War II Resistance-style operation, involving storing the ballot boxes on the other side of the French border and then distributing them via private households.

The moment we knew that the referendum really would be going ahead was early on Sunday morning when cars drove up to polling stations at and unknown people rushed the ballot boxes out of them and inside—through the cheering defence pickets.

In addition, the last-minute new software program that enabled any voter to vote at any polling station held together—with delays and wobbles—on the day.

Last, and most important, was the dignified patience and cheerfulness of those queueing—sometimes for five hours—to vote. Also, the refusal of the mass pickets confronting rampaging Spanish National

Police and Civil Guards to be provoked into abandoning the agreed approach of organised peaceful resistance.

This tactic meant that the attacking copper squads had to spend an inordinate amount of time violently dismantling pickets. In some cases—as when the inhabitants of Mont-Roig del Camp just pushed the Civil Guard out of town—it wasn’t even successful.

The behaviour of the people as they queued—passing the oldest and frailest to the front, sharing food and umbrellas under the drizzle, turning their mobiles to airplane mode to ease the stress on the network, cheering those who had voted as they came out after voting—was moving solidarity at its best.

### **Towards showdown**

On October 3, as this piece is being written, a wounded and humiliated Spanish state is about to try to suspend Catalan self-government. King Philip has appeared on television to denounce the Catalan government as an outlaw operation against whom the full force of the law must be used.

At the same time, however, today’s general strike in Catalonia has been accompanied by the biggest demonstrations in modern Catalan history.

The people, including those who don’t support independence, are completely outraged by the October 1 police attacks and determined to support Catalan institutions against the marauding Rajoy government.

The outcome will be: either a terminal crisis of the Spanish monarchy or a brutal Turkish-style repression in a “civilised” country of Western Europe.

• *Dick Nichols is the European correspondent of the Australian Green Left Weekly. He is based in Barcelona*

## **Blow and counter blow: the bare facts**

• **SEPTEMBER 15:** the Civil Guard confiscates 1.5 million official referendum posters and millions of ballot papers. A web site (“Let’s Paste Up”) is created, from which posters are downloaded and pasted up in millions by community paste-up teams.

• **SEPTEMBER 15:** the Civil Guard closes down referendum-related web sites. The Catalan government immediately reopens them behind proxy servers, beginning a cat-and-mouse game in which the Civil Guard closes down referendum-related web sites only for them to reappear.

• **SEPTEMBER 20:** the Civil Guard raids 11 Catalan government and government-related buildings, and arrests 13 high-level Catalan government officials. The ANC and Omnium Cultural call on people to mobilise outside the economics ministry in central Barcelona: 40,000 turn up.

• **SEPTEMBER 21:** the thirteen start to appear in court, supported by a demonstration of 20,000. Catalan premier Carles Puigdemont announces that the referendum is going ahead.

• **SEPTEMBER 24:** the ANC and Omnium Cultural announce their ‘marathon of mobilisation’ at 500 meetings across Catalonia.

• **SEPTEMBER 25:** the Spanish state prosecutor orders that the Catalan police be placed under the control of the Spanish interior ministry. The Catalan government refuses.

• **SEPTEMBER 26:** the Spanish state prosecutor’s office demands that the principals of all schools and community health centres hand over keys and security codes to the police. The Catalan health and education ministers take collective responsibility for making these premises available and school principals hand over keys to premier Puigdemont in a symbolic ceremony.

• **SEPTEMBER 26:** the Spanish state prosecutor in Catalonia orders all polling stations closed from Friday, September 29 and surrounded by a 100-metre no-go area. The judge in charge of the case against the referendum overrules him, saying polling stations can only be closed on October 1.

• **SEPTEMBER 27:** teaching unions and education associations launch the web site Open Schools through which people can volunteer to sleep over in schools from September 29 to October 1. 70,000 people volunteer in less than two days.

# Democracy: the people's weapon elites fear

by Ken Ferguson

**THAT ONE** image of a heavily armoured baton wielding Spanish riot cop attacking Catalan voters tells us more about the fragile nature of democracy than a thousand weighty books.

In a world dominated by the interests of the mega rich buttressed by legal power, a client mass media and ultimately brute force ranging from the type displayed by Rajoy's riot cops to Trump's nuclear ravings, democracy is the one weapon enabling a fight back.

Faced with demands for democratic rights the response of the powerful is at first to refuse it, then ration it by excluding women and the poor and finally, when forced to concede it fence it in with laws.

Indeed the Spanish state deployed the legal fig leaf to the brutal actions of their riot police claiming that they were only upholding the post Franco constitution implying the old "nothing to do with me guv" defence.

That same legal fairy tale also formed the basis of right wing Spanish premier Rajoy's bizarre claim that no referendum had taken place in Catalonia!

However sadly there is nothing new in this with such tactics used here in Britain many times from the mass repression of the miners—demonised as the "enemy within"—to today's state enforced starvation through benefit sanctions which are the reality for thousands in the supposedly caring democratic UK.

## Rights won in class struggle

The truth is that what democratic rights we possess were won in struggle from a hard faced ruling class concerned only to defend their wealth and power using tactics including hanging, imprisonment, force feeding, lock outs and military force.

Even in todays claimed "advanced democracy" the law sides with the powerful when it handcuffs and shackles trade unionists making the basic job of defending jobs and living standards a legal minefield.

And while the mood music now playing from Corbyn Labour suggesting change is welcome it is a shameful fact that New Labour, alongside it fellow social democratic parties across Europe and the US Democrats have been enthusiastic cheer leaders for the big business anti union agenda.

The neoliberal economics fashionable for the last thirty years posed the idea that all



**FRAGILE DEMOCRACY: Spanish riot cops and Guardia Civil attacked voters**

wisdom lay with market forces and the era of collective action by unions and collective provision of goods like education and health was outdated.

Well 30 years on, the neoliberal chickens are back in the coop and its not a pretty site.

Profit gluttons gorge on our essential services such as hospitals and schools through PFI rip offs, the destruction of social housing rages dramatically highlighted by the Grenfell tragedy while the so called "gig" economy plunges millions into economic and social insecurity.

But perhaps the most bitter fruits of this class collaboration can be seen in the rise of an ugly racist proto-fascist right most dramatically with Trump in the US but with the rise—covered in this *Voice*—of the AFD in Germany, Le Pen in France and far right governments in Eastern Europe.

Here in the UK the toxic right wing forces unleashed by Brexit have swept aside the puny forces who backed breaking with the EU as a route to socialist change creating a right wing dominated debate on the UK's future in which workers rights and needs go largely unmentioned.

Sadly when, with the SSP, the *Voice* backed a reluctant Remain vote last year it was precisely this debate dominating reaction that we warned of and that is now come pass placing worker's future in the hands of an isolated Theresa May and public school bigot Boris Johnson. The truth is a we report elsewhere neither the Remain or Leave camps the EU or Westminster has anything to say about or offer to the challenges of housing, health, jobs and living standards facing millions of working people.

These problems demand action both to defeat the racists and neoliberals and advance a politics capable of winning the real changes so desperately needed by working people.

This desperate need played a large part in the unpredicted Corbyn surge in the June election and now presented by some in Scottish Labour as the basis for shelving independence and embarking on the rather potholed British Road to Socialism.

Amidst the mass chanting and apparent re-emergence of socialist ideas the attractions of this approach are of course tempting but, in the Scottish context would constitute another diversion yet again into putting our efforts into finding a Westminster solution despite the multiple failures of the past.

## Rigged voting system

Scottish Labour's gains in June were rooted in the woeful failure by the SNP to advance or even defend the independence case at the polls allowing the Better Together case a free run with predictable result.

Indeed far from a Corbyn bounce, Labour votes fell in a clutch of seats and the politics of Better Together resulted in a big enough Tory surge to keep May in power in the UK.

Windy rhetoric about a Federal Britain is just that, in a UK with no interest in it and a Labour Party which isn't even challenging the rigged first past the post voting system or moving to scrap the taxpayer-funded retirement home of the unelected Lords.

The lessons remain clear that the surest way to win independence is to give it a purpose which meets the needs of Scotland's working class and convinces them that this is the key to a Scotland putting people before profit.



# Brexit: both sides negotiating further attacks on working people

by Colin Fox, SSP  
national co-spokesperson

**THE DESIRE** by both sides in the Brexit negotiations to see Britain maintain its access to the 'single market' is conflicted.

The EU wants to continue trading profitably with Europe's second biggest economy but demands the UK government accepts the conditions that accompany that access.

But few beyond the Scottish Socialist Party have pointed out that the rules of the EU 'single market' outlined in Treaty after Treaty are designed to assist 'laissez-faire' capitalism and prohibit for example public ownership or government intervention in that market.

Readers of this newspaper will recall how successive Scottish Governments [SNP and Labour] alleged they were unable to take our railways, postal services or energy industry back into public ownership because of these rules.

CalMac services too were subject to tendering processes demanded by the EU. Their political refusal to support nationalisation was the central issue of course but the 'single market' rules provided many a useful subterfuge.

## Brexit impact

With that point in mind I accepted an invitation to attend the Cross Party Group on Brexit at the Scottish Parliament recently to hear Peter Jones of *The Economist* outline his view on the likely impact of Britain leaving the EU.

*The Economist* is no friend of the labour movement but his presentation was interesting nonetheless. His conclusion? That whilst it is impossible to predict what the effect will be given the many



**RIGGED:** the EU's rules are designed to assist 'laissez-faire' capitalism

variables involved, he suspects it will not be good.

On the other hand he believes it will be much less damaging economically for Scotland than people like Nicola Sturgeon suggest.

The cost to the UK of Brexit since the vote itself has been estimated at 0.5 per cent of GDP reflected in the skilled labour leaving Britain, delayed investment decisions and trade losses arising from the economic uncertainty it has caused.

This is way short of the forecasts made by Sturgeon, Labour Party right-wingers, the Liberal Democrats and Greens at the time.

Furthermore Theresa May's offer to pay another €20billion to the EU in the 'transitional phase' after leaving in 2019, made in her Florence speech, should be seen in the context of an overall EU Budget of €158billion and Britain's annual net contribution of 8.1billion or 5.5 per cent of the total.

With Commissioners insisting 'No country outside the EU can enjoy the same benefits as

member states' the EU is determined to see the UK penalised for jeopardising their project.

The UK government are therefore under more pressure to reach a deal by 2019. Failure to do so would mean World Trade Organisation tariffs are applied to all EU/UK trade.

Any such taxes would be far more detrimental to the UK than the EU since imported foodstuffs from non-EU countries for example have a tariff of 39.9 per cent added, with dairy at 39.4 per cent and flour/cereals on 25.5 per cent.

As Britain imports most of our foodstuff these would also become much more expensive and push up inflation.

The Brexit debate has thrown up many remarkable political developments. The Labour Party is perhaps the most divided over the issue.

Many of Corbyn's MPs have refused to accept his instructions or the 2016 Referendum result and have demanded it is overturned. Fifty Labour MPs led by Chuka Umunna defied the party whip in a recent Commons vote on the issue.

Former leader Tony Blair epitomises this view best of all. Unfortunately for 'Remainers' his legacy remains a toxic presence in British politics for most people.

I reminded people at the Cross Party Group that the Scottish Socialist Party called for a Remain vote as 'the lesser of two evils' having found little to attract us to a 'Leave' message full of 'Little Englander' nationalism, suspect economic claims and an ominous right wing warning to 'Take back control'.

The Brexit negotiations again leave working people without control, for, as they say in US sporting circles we have 'no skin in the game'.

Neither the EU Commissioners nor the UK government represent our interests. Both are determined to increase the rate of exploitation and misery of working people. Both threaten further casualisation, poverty wages, privatisation of public services, financialisation of our economy, centralisation of economic power and increased exploitation for profit.

## Fight class attacks

The Scottish Socialist Party will continue to work with others aiming to stop attacks on the living standards of working class people emerging from any Brexit deal. We will continue to fight for improved pay and conditions for all workers migrant labour and native.

That is the best way to respond to the attacks the Tories will inevitably launch in this latest crisis of neoliberal capitalism. And given their tiny Parliamentary majority at Westminster and the deep divisions within the Tory party this task may well reap greater rewards than hitherto.

# A hurricane with no shelter for people with disabilities

**Sandra Webster** warns of the looming cruelties of Universal Credit

**WHEN BIG** business is saying that this Tory Government are no longer the party of big business and reminiscing about the “halcyon days” of Blair and Brown it is fair to say the Tory Party are on a sticky wicket.

Look behind the headlines though and you can clearly see the calamity their reign of terror is having on ordinary people.

Figures the DWP are attempting to hide from public view. However even their allies are beginning to criticise their inhuman policies.

The process was started by Cameron and continued by May recently who outside Downing Street promised “to protect the most vulnerable.”

Their is no evidence of this as Universal Credit continues to be rolled out and it is being reported it can take sometimes months for payments to be made to working people and those of working age. That is months without any support to working families.

## Terrible impact

Despite this, Universal Credit will continue to be rolled out and devastate lives. Areas where the process have begun have all reported the terrible impact. Some of those who condemn it are even Tory backbenchers and the DUP.

If the decision made for its continuation came back to parliament, there is the possibility the government might lose the vote so of course it will not.

It will be business as usual as the DWP are expected to make huge cuts in its budget.

I even heard an extreme right



**LET THEM EAT CAKE: UK PM Theresa May fails to answer the simple question put by Andrew Marr, ‘how can people with no money eat?’**

wing commentator describe benefits as a safety net. Far from the public eye is the impact on people with disabilities who receive work related ESA (Employment and Support Allowance).

Disability charity SCOPE estimates the average additional cost of disability to cost £550 per month. Those not placed in the support group or waiting to hear after not receiving enough points in the dreaded work related tests are expected to report of work related activities.

Scott is one of these individuals affected. He lives with autism and a visual impairment. He has been placed in the work related group.

Scott worked for REMPLOY for over 20 years. He needs support in employment. He has looked for work since the closure of REMPLOY and is desperate to work.

On the transfer to PIP his disability benefit was cut. He is a dignified man who looks exhausted and overwhelmed but quietly tells me he wants to work but knows he needs support.

He has applied for the tribunal to look again at his benefit changes but has not received a

date yet. Charities report while over 80 per cent of working adults have jobs this drops to 48 per cent for people with disabilities on a national level. People are being bullied to find jobs that are hard to find in the present economic climate.

Charities have raised concerns about the impact of the rolling out of Universal Credit and the special impact it is having on people with disabilities who require support.

Tracy Lizard of Inclusion said echoing many charities, that people with disabilities are again bearing the brunt and that most of this is happening outside the public gaze. Charities estimate that people in the work related activity group will be worse off by £50 per week.

This has been seen in areas where Universal Credit has been rolled out. Universal Credit means that for someone in the work related activity group their ESA and someone who supports them carers allowance will be counted as income despite the extra costs of their disability.

People having to move to the Work Related Group lose a sig-

nificant amount of benefit quickly. Many are on the edge of the cliff. Yet the most vulnerable will be protected. I ask myself who the Tories consider this to be?

A hurricane is brewing and there is no shelter for people with disabilities who find themselves the target of this government.

While May attempts to “woo” young people there is little support for people with disabilities who remain the unheard in this. This is not a debate but a crisis.

There maybe a tiny glimmer of hope for payment of Universal Credit but only after an outcry by those regarded as allies.

It is our job as socialists to support our brothers and sisters and all who are being punished for the simple act of having a disability that impairs their ability to find work which often is not there to find or is unsuitable.

## Storm is coming

As the *Voice* has reported the Smith Commission was granted powers to deal with disability and carers benefits.

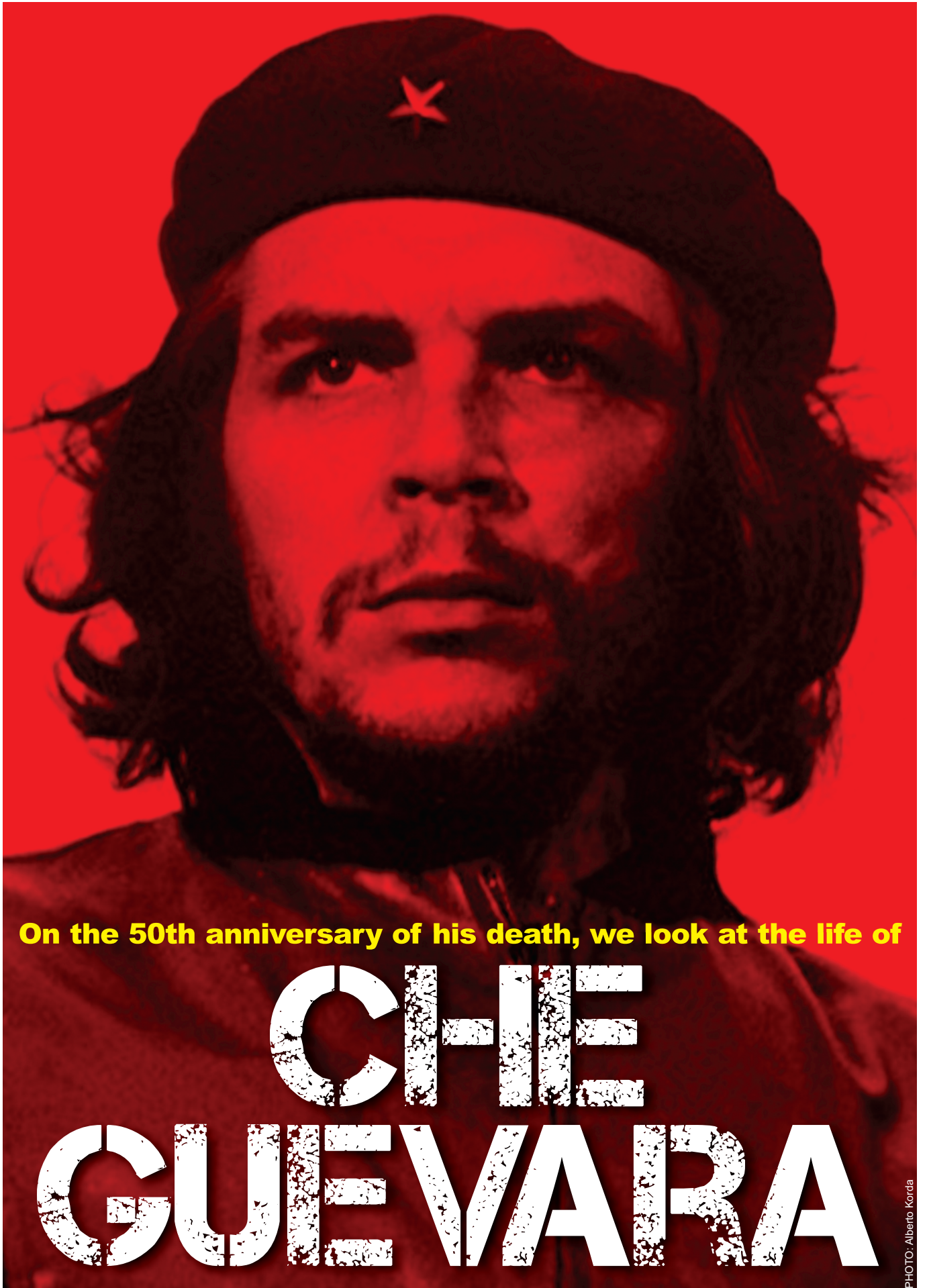
Jeane Freeman emphasises the need to get it right which may take a couple of years.

While Holyrood and Westminster blame each other, who will support those “economic units” not deemed to be worthwhile. Many cannot wait and do not have the bus fare to get to a food bank.

A storm is coming and it is our role to give the voiceless support to be heard and ensure an economy where there is again money for supported employment and indeed protection for the most vulnerable.

As we move to the right it is time to present an alternative vision and kindness that the left has. That is why we are socialists.





On the 50th anniversary of his death, we look at the life of

# CHE GUEVARA

PHOTO: Alberto Korda

*by Brian H Pollitt*

**ON 9** October 1967, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was murdered in the schoolhouse of the Bolivian village of La Higuera.

He had been captured some 24 hours before. Encircled by US-trained Bolivian Rangers, he had tried to fight his way out but was rendered helpless when a bullet disabled his M-2 carbine while another wounded him in the leg.

High-level discussions between the C.I.A. and the Bolivian military junta in La Paz concluded with the latter's decision to execute their prisoner. Sergeant Mario Terán—fortified by alcohol—carried out the task. Death was not immediate.

Terán had been instructed that Che was officially to have 'died of his wounds' and while his initial burst of gun fire felled him, it was with multiple wounds to the arms and legs. He was killed with later shots to the chest.

Representatives of the Bolivian High Command then took a decision they were later to regret. When captured, Che had been unkempt and emaciated and in death lay crumpled on a dirt floor.

The Junta wished it to be unmistakably clear that they had in fact killed the legendary Che Guevara.

His body was therefore flown to the neighbouring town of Vallegrande, where he was stripped to the waist and cleaned and his hair was washed and combed.

When put on display to be photographed by the international media, the corpse—with opened eyes—was thus clearly that of Che Guevara.

### **Che the martyr**

But for many the image was also evocative of the figure and sacrifice of Jesus Christ and in rural Bolivia and more widely, the dead Guevara came to be seen not as a failed Communist guerrilla leader but as a martyr in the cause of the poor and oppressed.

In future years he was thus more generally revered than reviled—and by some even sanctified.

Rumours of Che's death spread swiftly within Cuba but were sceptically received. He had disappeared from public view in 1965 and the international press had already reported him killed more than once in Africa and in the Dominican Republic.

Moreover, during Cuba's revolutionary war, Che had appeared to have a charmed life, acting with great tactical audacity and causing his Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro to reprimand him for his total disregard for his personal safety.

He could be—and was—wounded but otherwise he seemed indestructible.

In one famous incident, when commanding the guerilla column that besieged and took the key provincial capital of Santa Clara in December 1958, he had maintained contact with his forces by casually walking around the city's main square under the eyes (and guns) of a contingent of Batista's troops corralled on, and firing from, the top floor of the city's main hotel.

Some days after 9 October, however, in a televised address to the nation, Castro confirmed Che's death, showing the photographs of his body as it had been displayed by the Bolivian military.

The next day the now-iconic Korda photograph, taken in 1960, was published nationally for the first time as the black-bordered back page of the newspaper Granma.

# Remember a revolution



**UNRANKED:**  
Che had gone to Cuba as an unranked member of Castro's expeditionary force in December 1956 and became recognised as a national figure only after the Revolutionary Government took power in January 1959

A few days later, on the evening of Thursday 18 October, Castro addressed a Memorial meeting held in Havana's Revolution Square. In contrast to official celebrations of important anniversaries of the Revolution such as the 26 July, no public holiday was declared and those attending the Memorial Meeting did so after their day's work.

Neither was any additional public transport laid on which—given Havana's notoriously deficient bus service—meant that many would have to walk several miles to and from the Square.

It was not clear that dark evening just how many attended the Memorial meeting but those assembled numbered at least 400 thousand. Such an impressive manifestation of the esteem in which Che was held by the Cuban



# Remembering Revolutionary



populace merited some explanation. Che had come to Cuba as an unranked member of Castro's expeditionary force in December 1956 and became recognised as a national figure only after the Revolutionary Government took power in January 1959.

As both his nickname and accent indicated, he was not Cuban but from Argentina and both then and now nationalist sentiments in Cuba were palpably strong. How then was he so rapidly to command an obvious and widespread popular admiration?

To begin with, it could be noted that Che Guevara was not the only foreigner to achieve prominence in Cuba's long struggles for independence, firstly from Spain and then from the USA.

In the 19th century, for example,

**UNITY: Guevara embodied in signal fashion the unity of words and deeds**

General Máximo Gómez—a citizen of the Dominican Republic—had been a key military and political leader of Cuba's insurrectionary forces.

And, as Castro was swiftly to make clear after 1959, a powerful strand in Cuban nationalist thought had always sought not just insular but continental independence.

More important, of course, were particular facets of Che's character that exercised a strong appeal for ordinary Cubans. His personal courage was evidently one of them.

Another was his physical stamina, particularly as this was demonstrated in unusually taxing circumstances. (That he suffered from crippling asthma attacks was well known). He was clearly a man of indomitable personal willpower.

His candour in the public airing of political or administrative problems—which distinguished him from the generality of political or administrative leaders—was also much appreciated.

A trivial anecdote serves to make the point: "How can socialism be respected if all we can make is this kind of rubbish?" he remarked in January 1963, when trying (in the presence of a visiting foreign delegation) to light his cigar with the first of several spluttering matches manufactured by his own Ministry of Industries.

Warming to his theme, he continued by recounting the efforts of fraternal Czechoslovak chemists to devise a formula adequate for Cuba's production of an equivalent to Coca Cola. He deemed the resultant beverage to taste like "battery acid".

## **Distaste for diplomatic niceties**

His distaste for the diplomatic niceties was displayed on more serious stages and graver issues when he represented the Cuban government on a visit to North Africa.

All of Cuba's modern armaments had been supplied by the USSR free of charge and, in a widely reported discussion with Egyptian students and others, he criticised Cuba's most important ally for requiring other anti-imperialist Third World countries to pay for Soviet weaponry.

He was censured for this at the highest political level within Cuba but versions of his tactless conduct were circulated and well-received on the streets.

Che was also recognised both to be an exceptionally hard worker and one who rejected the various perks available to those in high office.

When appointed President of the National Bank, his low opinion of monetary rewards—indeed of money itself—was signalled when Cuba's newly printed bank notes appeared bearing his deliberately informal signature—Che.

When acting as Minister of Industries, the lights of his office were often seen burning late at night. (This was when he wrote most of the letters and articles that were to be published in nine volumes after his death).

Visitors unfamiliar with his work regime could be disconcerted to find him presiding over early morning meetings in fatigues rumpled after a brief night's sleep on his office couch.

But one quality above all commanded the respect of ordinary Cubans: Guevara embodied in signal fashion the unity of words and deeds.

He was a great advocate of the supremacy of moral over material incentives in Cuba's socialist development and his



theoretical zeal in this sparked sharp debate in the country's ideological journals. (For Marx, after all, the dominant distributive principle in the 'first stage' of socialist development had been a different one, namely: "From each according to his ability to each according to his work").

For Che, the most important expression of moral incentives was unpaid voluntary work, especially in arduous tasks such as the manual cutting of sugar-cane.

And in this, as in everything else he advocated, he matched his words with his actions, being found in the forefront of every kind of campaign where voluntary labour was mobilised to cut cane, dig ditches, work in the docks or shift 325lb bags in the warehouses of the sugar mills.

**AUDACITY:** during Cuba's revolutionary war, Che had appeared to have a charmed life, acting with great tactical audacity and causing his Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro to reprimand him for his total disregard for his personal safety

It was widely known that Che envisaged the creation of a 'New Man' as a prerequisite for the development of 'true' socialism. This 'New Man' was an austere figure, equally accomplished as a producer or a warrior, and motivated by a passion to abolish poverty and oppression and to create, defend and spread socialist society.

What was recognised and respected within Cuba, of course, was that Che Guevara himself was the embodiment par excellence of all the attributes of that 'New Man'. Many also realised that it was an idealistic creation. Old and young might be encouraged to 'be like Che' but few could actually become like him. In his address to Cuba's Memorial meeting of October 1967, Fidel Castro himself seemed to acknowledge this. He remarked, in his eulogy, that Che was "a man from another century".

## A romantic, revolutionary hero

In the years following his death, Che was to become an increasingly familiar figure in a myriad of countries.

Korda's iconic photograph was reproduced both more and less faithfully on countless banners, posters, walls and leaflets world-wide, spreading the legend of Guevara as a romantic, revolutionary hero whose name could be invoked in the most diverse conditions and for the most diverse causes.

Comparatively few of those embellishing their political actions with his physical image were well-versed in his writings on the theory and practice of socialism or on theories of revolutionary warfare.

If they had been, they might have understood more clearly why, on the one hand, Che had reputable critics who dissented from many of his views, while, on the other, the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre could describe him after his death as "the most complete human being of our age".

But in commemorating the 50th anniversary of his death, it seems enough for the moment to remember Ernesto 'Che' Guevara as a principled internationalist revolutionary whose courageous example still inspires multitudes in their struggles against poverty and oppression.

## Epilogue

After his death, Che Guevara's body was flown to Vallegrande to be photographed in the laundry house of the town's small hospital. This currently serves as the base for some 20 Cuban doctors who provide free medical assistance to the local population under Cuba's programme of medical assistance to Bolivia.

Sergeant Mario Terán, who killed Che, spent the years that followed in hiding, fearful of retaliation. In 2006, he was found to be virtually blind, having developed cataracts in both eyes.

His sight was restored by Cuban ophthalmic surgeons working in La Paz as part of the joint Cuban-Venezuelan sight-saving programme 'Operacion Miraglo'.

**• Brian Pollitt is one of the foremost experts on Latin America in Scotland. Son of the former General Secretary of the Communist Party Harry Pollitt, Brian led the one of the earliest British delegations to Cuba after the revolution when President of the**

**Cambridge Union Society. Later he moved to work in Cuba for several years during which time he met Che Guevara on a number of occasions. In the early 1970s, Brian worked in Chile during the Allende administration and later for the**

**Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Having settled in Scotland, he became a leading member of Cuba Solidarity being prominent in the formation and activities of the charity Scottish Medical Aid for Cuba. Brian is a member of the Scottish Socialist Party.**



# Don Roberto: cowboy, indy supporter, champion of women's and workers rights

Book review: *An Eagle in the Hen-House: Selected Political Speeches and Writings of RB Cunningham Graham*. Edited by **Lachlan Munro**, Ayton Publishing, £9.99

by **Ken Ferguson**

**ROBERT BONTINE** Cunningham Graham—known from his days as an Argentinean cowboy as “Don Roberto”—is little recognised in Scotland today.

It is thus to be much welcomed that a new collection of his writing and speeches, edited by Lachlan Munro, is now available.

This multi faceted man was, from the late 19th century through to the his death in the 1930s, a towering figure in politics, journalism and as a supporter of women's rights, workers struggle and Scottish self government.

The much overworked label “colourful” is simply inadequate for Cunningham Graham who in his youth was a cowboy in Texas and the Argentine, inherited a debt ridden Scottish estate, served as a radical liberal MP, befriended Keir Hardie, knew Engels and William Morris and embraced a range of progressive causes.

## Striking resonance

Faced with such a life, Mr Munro has brought together a range of material which both illustrates his subject's many campaigns and concerns and keeps striking the reader with their resonance in today's world.

The widespread revulsion produced at the bias of the mainstream press during the 2014 referendum for example isn't new.

Writing in 1891 he regrets that the hopes of the radical movement that a free press would be, as one radical put it “a mighty auxiliary”, in the struggle for change have been dashed and he labels them “The reptile press” saying “if the name be Standard, Times or Star the press is dead against the infernal poor.”

Echoing today's activists he concludes, “It would seem that the press is nobbled. nobbled by the capitalists and now, instead of being an instrument of freedom, it has become a reptile of the basest sort.”

At the height of the militant campaign for women's suffrage, RB took on those claiming men were of superior intelligence to women, writing:

“It has however often struck me that a convention of the most foolish women in Great Britain, chosen with the greatest care by the most incompetent of the female electorate, could not well be foolisher than the British House of Commons elected, as it is at present, entirely by men.”

Cunningham Graham had involvement with both the early Labour movement and at the birth of what became today's SNP.

He was thrown out of the House of Commons as a result of his support for shorter working hours for miners when he challenged the power of unelected Lords—he represented working class Coatbridge as a Liberal at the time.

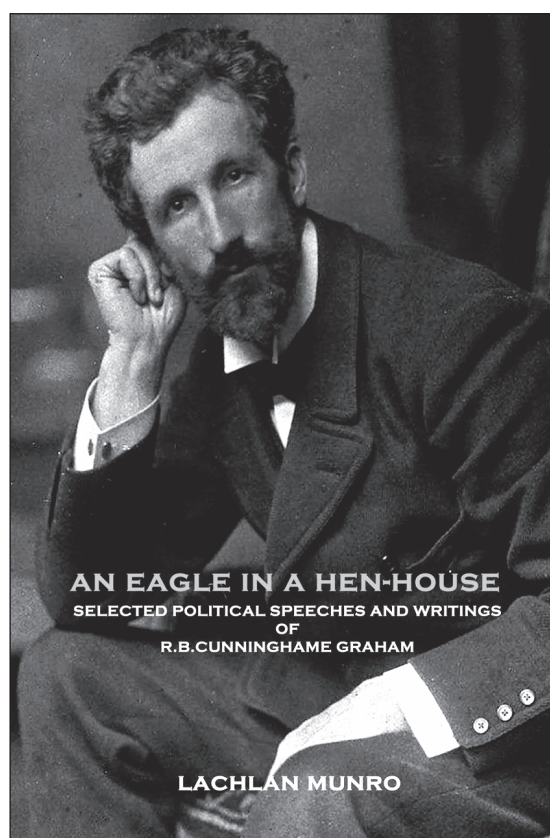
As a firm internationalist he took up the cudgels in support of Native Americans, against British Imperialism and many other causes.

Finally giving the lie to the old cliché that you cannot support self government and be an internationalist he backed Scotland's cause along with luminaries of his day such as Compton MacKenzie and Hugh McDiarmid.

## Radical ideas

This book is a rich seam not just of RB's ideas but also of the world of change they sprung from and that have led to the Scotland of today where many of his radical ideas are now mainstream—in part due to his work and that of his fellow pioneers.

It is to be hoped that this valuable book will be widely read and perhaps lead to a biography of the remarkable “Don Roberto”. Surely such a book would rapidly be taken up by Hollywood as a rip-roaring yarn.



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# End austerity: rely on workers' united action

by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

**SOMETHING MAJOR** must be happening when you get a senior Tory party conference delegate declaring on TV: "We need to rename our party to the Conservative Workers Party"!

The proposed launch of the CWP isn't just a sick joke, when compared with the Tories' obnoxious track record on slashing wages, and services and aiming to wipe out workers' rights.

It's also a half-acknowledged reflection of the latent power of working class people to change the society we live in, and the sheer dread of the Tories and their millionaire cohort at the mounting anger and opposition of worker.

The Tories are panic-stricken at the potential of the lid blowing off the pressure cooker of plummeting pay and rising inflation, with outbreaks of strike action over recent months—and unanimous backing at the recent TUC conference for coordinated demonstrations and strike action against the pay cap.

## Age of austerity

TUC research has shown five million public sector workers have lost between £2,000 to £5,000 in wages from the zero and 1 per cent pay cap of the last seven years.

Trade unions in the civil service and councils have lodged pay claims of 5 per cent to stop the ongoing annual pay cuts; and at least the current RPI inflation rate of 3.9 per cent in the case of NHS unions.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka has rightly called on other public sector unions to do likewise, to prepare the grounds for actual strike ballots, in order to overcome the high-hurdles obstructions to action imposed by the 2016 Tory anti union law with its 50 per cent threshold.

The Tories are divided on how to respond, but determined to divide and defeat workers as they beat a retreat on their pay cap. They know a total, across-the-board climbdown would embolden millions of workers—including in the private sector—who are struggling to survive the planned poverty of austerity. But they also know the pay cap is unsustainable.

The Tories resort to trickery, with talk of responding to the Pay Review Bodies' Reports—hiding the fact these bodies only cover less than 45 per cent of public sector workers—and offer piddling pay rises to prison officers and police that don't even match half the 3.9 per cent inflation rate.

The warnings we've made of their divisive tactics have materialised: after seven long years of draconian pay cuts, they might offer token rises a bit above the 1 per cent cap to prison officers, police, firefighters and nurses—but exclude civil service and council staff, in the hope they don't enjoy the same levels of public sympathy.

Also any pay concessions are poised to be paid for by job cuts and slashed services. Already, the GMB union has calculated the loss of nearly a million public sector jobs since 2010.

**CALLING CORBYN: what level of pay rise is on offer when Labour 'scrap the cap'?**

PHOTO: Craig Maclean



Workers will all welcome the promises of both Jeremy Corbyn and the current SNP government to end the Tory pay cap.

But what remains unanswered from both is what level of pay rise is on offer when they 'scrap the cap'. Neither has openly backed the modest demands of 5 per cent demanded by civil service and council unions.

In the most immediate situation, will any pay rise from the Scottish Government be funded by taxing the rich, and mounting a serious struggle to win back some of the £billions robbed from Scottish budgets by successive Tory and Labour Westminster governments?

In the private sector—such as retail—any recent concessions on paltry pay have been accompanied by savage attacks on other terms and conditions, such as premium pay-

ments for working Sundays, bank holidays, nightshifts or other antisocial hours. Robbing Peter to pay Peter!

The real danger is that unless the unions take united, decisive action to prevent it, the Scottish and UK governments—and alongside this, local councils—will try to trade off pay rises for cuts to jobs, conditions and public services.

The anti-austerity message from Jeremy Corbyn has emboldened workers in England that something radically different is available. The brutal realities of pay cuts and other assaults on conditions has led to outbursts of small strikes—such as BA cabin crews, and the courageous group of McDonald's workers—which, in my own experience, has encouraged some other workers to talk about the role of the unions.

Royal Mail workers in the CWU—110,000 of them—have voted for strikes against the loss of up to 30 per cent of their pensions; for a decent wage on retirement.

## Stand by your post

Their anger has been fuelled by the hand-out of £770million in dividends to shareholders, and the payment of up to £200,000 a year to top Royal Mail bosses' separate pension pots, which remain untouched.

The CWU's call for a shorter working week without loss of earnings, exactly matches workers' needs in general—and matches the policies of the SSP.

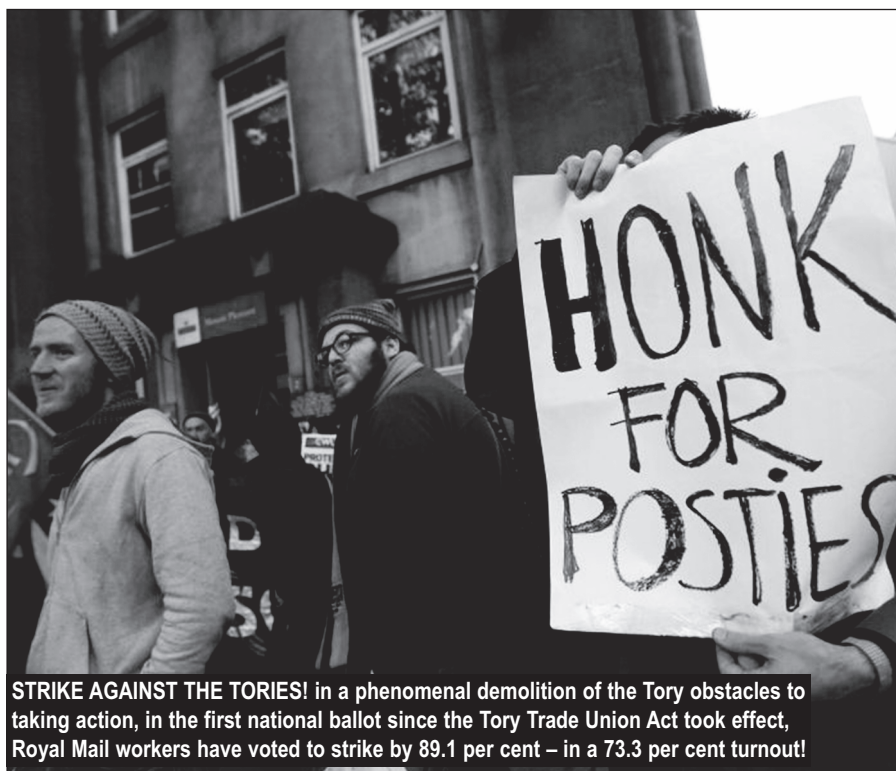
RMT members across several profiteering rail companies are striking against the safety-threatening Driver Only Operated trains being imposed as government policy. They deserve the solidarity of other unions.

The time is ripening for coordinated action on pay and conditions. Not at the expense of jobs, or public services, but at the expense of the obscenely rich and profiteering corporations.

The welcome pledge by PCS leader Mark Serwotka to initiate meetings of all public sector unions could help mobilise millions of public sector workers.

Private sector workplaces should build solidarity with workers in Royal Mail, the railways, and the public sector, making demands on our own employers for pay rises but without loss of jobs or other terms and conditions.





**STRIKE AGAINST THE TORIES!** in a phenomenal demolition of the Tory obstacles to taking action, in the first national ballot since the Tory Trade Union Act took effect, Royal Mail workers have voted to strike by 89.1 per cent – in a 73.3 per cent turnout!

The season of budgets from the Westminster, Holyrood and local councils is upon us. The unions should unite with community groups and socialists in demanding real actions to reverse the tsunami of austerity.

The SSP is calling on unions to mount a battle to demand the funding for a £10 Living Wage for all 500,000 Scottish workers employed directly or indirectly by the Scottish government and the 32 Scottish councils.

This would help combat poverty pay. It would set a benchmark for the other 80 per cent of workers employed in the private sector. It would be a serious step by the unions to implement the “£10 minimum wage for all workers” that they agreed—unanimously—at the September 2014 TUC conference!

### **Acid test for Labour and SNP**

But Scottish and council politicians should be bombarded to set No Cuts budgets, demanding the funding off Westminster and Holyrood to at least protect existing jobs and services, with the £10 minimum included, and equal pay for women.

SNP Councillors, MSPs and MPs won mandates by claiming to be anti-austerity.

In England, Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour won massively increased support with its anti-austerity message. Now in Scottish Labour, Richard Leonard is seeking votes as leader by association with Corbyn.

All these political forces need to be put to the test with demands for meaningful action. Instead of passing on nearly £3 billion of Westminster cuts since 2010, the SNP

government needs to face a movement demanding they defy all Tory cuts and win back £billions through mass action.

The teachers’ union, EIS, is currently in tripartite talks where the Scottish government and COSLA (councils) have offered 1.5 per cent pay rise for new teachers and those at the top end of the pay scale, and only 1 per cent for other teachers. That hardly matches Nicola Sturgeon’s bold public promises of ending the pay cap!

Labour and SNP councillors need to be pounded with pressure to reverse their sorry record of cutting jobs, pay and public services.

The acid test for Corbyn’s Labour has been their baleful role in the battle between Birmingham bin workers and the city’s Labour council. There, Labour has acted to ‘delete’ 113 safety critical bin collectors’ jobs, with a £5,000 pay cut; employed agency workers to undermine the resultant strike action; and then reneged on a deal brokered through ACAS—issuing real, live redundancy notices to their own workers. This was only halted by the resumed strike action of the bin workers, which helped Unite the union win a court ruling that outlawed Labour’s redundancy notices.

Here’s the crunch; the warning to anyone falling for the idea that workers should “wait for a Corbyn government” rather than fight back now, with strikes where necessary. Not once has Jeremy condemned the role of Birmingham’s Labour councillors. Not once has the massively popular, anti-austerity, left-wing Corbyn leadership is-

sued a call to its own Labour councillors, anywhere, to defy Tory funding cuts, to set No Cuts budgets.

Instead, as well as the savagery suffered at the hands of years of Labour councils in Scotland, their counterparts in Durham and Derby have provoked strikes by teaching assistants, against Labour council pay cuts of 23 per cent; with no condemnation, let alone expulsion, of these Labour axe-wielders by the national, Corbyn Labour leadership.

Workers have been undoubtedly enthused and encouraged to fight back by the inspiring speeches of Jeremy Corbyn, with their core message of standing up ‘for the many, not the few’. And the Corbyn surge in England has seriously weakened the May Tory regime. But it would be fatal to rely on ‘waiting for Godot’.

How are workers and their families meant to live whilst waiting for the election of Corbyn as Prime Minister? How can workers topple the enfeebled Tory regime without taking action here and now?

Crucially can we believe there will be an outright end to austerity under Labour—even when led by Jeremy Corbyn—given their failure when the chips are down in several local authorities, and the absence of any sanctions against right-wing Labour councillors from the left-wing UK leadership?

### **Workers' potential power**

The Tories, in their own perverse fashion, recognise the potential power of the organised trade union movement, and its potential allies amongst students and other young people.

We need to rely on that potential and help mobilise it—not wait for some future salvation by politicians, no matter how decent or well-intentioned.

Trade unionists, community campaigners, young people and socialists need to help build the campaign for coordinated demos and strike action to reverse the tide of cuts to our share of the wealth which we created in the first place.

The SSP is ready and willing to play its part (in our unions, communities and colleges) in the struggle for a £10 minimum wage here and now, to scrap the cap, with pay rises to compensate for seven years of wage cuts; No Cuts council and Scottish budgets, with a struggle to win back some of the £billions stolen off Scotland by Tory and Labour governments; for an immediate 35-hour maximum working week to share out the workload and take advantage of new technology; and ultimately for a socialist society run by the many millions, not the few millionaires.

# German far right election gains pose sharp questions for the left

by Connor Beaton

**THE DRAMATIC** re-entry of the far-right to Germany's national parliament for the first time since the end of World War II has captured worldwide attention.

On the ground, left activists are preparing to fight even harder against the so-called Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The election results hold little for the parties of the centre-ground to celebrate. Though the stagnant Social Democrats (SPD), recording just 20.5 per cent of the vote, came nowhere close to eclipsing the two permanently-linked Christian Democratic parties, Merkel's parliamentary bloc took an even more brutal beating, with her parties' vote share shrinking to 33.3 per cent.

## Giants lose ground

As in France, the giants of German politics, who governed in an incestuous "grand coalition" for the past four years, have rapidly lost ground in a changing and unpredictable political landscape.

Besides the far-right AfD, the Thatcherite and "pro-business" Free Democratic Party (FDP) can celebrate its return to parlia-

ment after a four-year hiatus, retaking its traditional role as kingmakers.

Alongside the Greens, they are widely expected to ally themselves with Merkel in a national coalition government, further shredding the Greens' already tenuous left-wing credentials in Germany.

The so-called black-yellow-green "Jamaica coalition" is already being presented to the liberal-minded layer of the German middle class as a bulwark against fascism and the AfD.

But last-ditch alliances of the centre are no more likely to succeed in seeing off the far-right in Germany than they are in France, where Macron is waging war against organised labour while failing to land serious blows against Le Pen's National Front.

In fact, antifascist activists blame the established parties for the AfD's rise.

I had a chance encounter in Perth, during the hundreds-strong antifascist mobilisation against the Scottish Defence League in September, with Conny Renkl, a Berlin member of Germany's oldest antifascist organisation, the Union of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (VVN-BdA).

Speaking to me after the election, he pinned the rise of the AfD—who, he warned, have a significant fascist wing lurking below a more palatable "national-conservative" leadership—on the established parties' "deception" of working class people and, almost apologetically, the "weakness of the antifascist forces to show the social demagoguery of the AfD and its character as a tool of the rich oligarchy".

As well as pointing the finger at the German establishment, who never lived up to Helmut Kohl's promise to turn the former socialist East into a "land of milk and honey" (or "blühende Landschaften"), Renkl is also critical towards Die Linke, the leftist party which celebrated its tenth birthday this summer.

By taking part in state-level coalition governments, he argues, Die Linke has placed itself in the position of administering austerity—something subject to intense debate in the party.

Die Linke, having seen its vote gone up only slightly from 8.6 per cent in 2013 to a disappointing 9.2 per cent this year, is riven with internal conflict on many key issues.

Oskar Lafontaine, who played a critical role in founding the party by leading a splinter from the SPD in 2005, has blamed the party's progressive position on refugees for a poor showing among working class and unemployed voters.

Sahra Wagenknecht, his wife and one of Die Linke's two leading election candidates, has also called for a renewed effort to win over AfD voters by addressing "problems arising from the arrival of refugees".

These overtures to anti-

refugee voters have been firmly rejected by party co-leader Katja Kipping and ex-leader Gregor Gysi, but reflect a wider divide in a party desperate to make a similar electoral breakthrough.

Meanwhile, in Hamburg, the left does have something to celebrate: a record 12.2 per cent of the vote for Die Linke off the back of the G20 protests, which regular readers of the Voice will know rocked the city in July.

This comes despite the mainstream media consensus that the massive mobilisation against the G20 summit of world leaders would only provide ammunition to the right, who did try valiantly to associate the radical left with images, stripped of all meaningful context, showing burning cars and looted shops.

## Challenge capitalism

In St Pauli and Sternschanze, where most of the protests took place, Die Linke climbed nearly 10 percentage points into first place for the first time, almost entirely at the expense of the SPD, who tried to clamp down on the protests as leaders of Hamburg's state government and Merkel's coalition partners.

The lesson to be drawn is that a bold, creative and direct challenge to globalisation, capitalism, racism and austerity can pay electoral dividends for the left without it having to triangulate to racist and right-wing positions on immigration and asylum.

If anything, in the years to come, with the AfD now possessing the credibility and weight afforded by its parliamentary status, the left will have to be even bolder in challenging privilege and championing socialism and equality.



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# Events tell story of Basque refugee kids in Montrose

*by Mike Arnott, Scotland Secretary,  
International Brigades Memorial  
Trust*

ON 26 April 1937, the quiet market town of Guernica, once the capital of the Basque country, was bombed by German planes flying under Franco's colours.

After the bombing, fears were expressed that the fascists would bomb other civilian targets in the Basque country, particularly Bilbao. Consequently, 25,000 Basque children were sent out of Spain to different parts of Europe.

The numbers of the children who came to Britain vary in different accounts, but according to the Basque Children of '37 Association, some 3,826 children came, together with 96 teachers, 118 helpers and 15 catholic priests aboard the ship SS Habana, which left the port of Santurce on the morning of 21st May 1937 on its journey to Southampton.

## Largest immigration

It was, at the time, the single largest immigration to the UK.

The children were kept at a huge tented town at Eastleigh in Hampshire and eventually dispersed to 90 children's 'colonies' across Britain, the only one in Scotland being at Mall Park House in Montrose.

This is the back story to an exhibition, put together by BCA'37, which ran at the Wellgate Library in Dundee last month, which focused on the children's experiences in the various parts of the UK with a special focus on the Montrose children.

It is a fascinating story, particularly when considered against the contemporary background of the Dubbs scheme.

Not that the government in 1937 was a paragon of compassion: the Basque Niños were given not a penny of support by the British State and every one had to be vouched for and guaranteed board and lodging by the



**CIVILIAN TARGETS:** after the bombing of Guernica, 3,826 Basque children came to Britain, which at the time was the single largest immigration to the UK

voluntary organisations who combined to care for them.

The hosting of the Basque children in Montrose was the result of a campaign of fundraising in Dundee, Angus and the surrounding areas, attracting pledges and funds from over 30 organisations including the Women's Liberal Association, TOC-H, Shop Assistants Union and many more.

Fundraising drives and concerts were held in the Caird Hall and other venues, and a football match between local dockers and the crew of a Spanish ship in Dundee's port donated the gate money.

A home for the children had been

sought in the City but nothing suitable could be secured, so the children found themselves a few miles down the coast at Montrose, as guests of the Dundee Free Breakfast Mission in their holiday home; Mall Park House.

The 80th anniversary of their arrival is also to be commemorated in musical form, with bands Na Mara and Gallo Rojo playing free gigs at the Jaffle Joint in Edinburgh at 8.30pm on 6 October and at the Neptune Bar in Montrose at 3pm on Saturday the 7th. It will be a special event for Na Mara member Rob Garcia, who is the son of one of the Montrose children.

Roz Paterson looks at some worrying new research

**ONE THING** we can all agree on—and that includes even the most right-wing, climate-change sceptical, oil-drunk zealot—is that there is more carbon dioxide (CO<sup>2</sup>) in Earth's atmosphere now than at any other time in human history. And, as plants need CO<sup>2</sup> to photosynthesise, the more CO<sup>2</sup> the better, right? Bigger crops, right? More food, right?

Actually, wrong. One of the most disquieting findings in a strand of scientific research so obscure we don't even really have a name for it yet—kind of maths meets agriculture via climatey stuff—is that the crops we are growing may be turning to junk, thanks to the increasing levels of CO<sup>2</sup> in the atmosphere.

By junk, we're talking about significant depletions in protein, zinc, calcium and other essential nutrients, enough to generate serious and worrisome human health crises somewhere not too far down the line. For instance, just to scare you, by 2050, some 150 million people could be at risk of protein deficiency, leading to malnutrition and premature death, due to a catastrophic decline in protein in rice crops.

## Less nutrients

You've never heard about this before? You're not the only one. Irakle Loladze, a mathematician straying into the realms of biology, recently published a paper on this very matter, with little support in terms of grants (none of the grant-funders had an inkling what he was talking about), and even less research to draw on, other than a 1997 study documenting the crash in nutrients in rice.

He found that, the more CO<sup>2</sup>, the more sugars such as glucose a plant will produce—at the expense of the nutrients that human beings need to thrive, including dietary iron and zinc.

It has already been established that the food we eat has been getting increasingly less nutritious over the last half-century. We assumed it was a simple case of bigger yield = more diluted nutritional content.

A study in 2004 seemed to suggest this may not be the case, as it found that



garden crops (less likely to be treated with industrial fertilisers, so less likely to be the bumper-sized produce seen in supermarkets) had also experienced a nutritional decline since the 1950s.

We assumed this was down to the increasingly narrow range of varieties favoured. Surely a reintroduction of heritage strains would solve this problem?

Loladze's findings suggest not. It's the atmosphere, stupid.

Before the Industrial Revolution, CO<sup>2</sup> levels in our atmosphere were around 280 parts per million (ppm). We've now topped 400ppm, and predicted to reach 550ppm within 50 years.

It's a crisis in the making. For those who will starve to death for lack of nutrients, and for those who will die of heart disease and diabetes through the over-abundance of carbohydrates in food they thought was good for them. Yet it is going under the radar of most research bodies, due to a dearth of data and the fact that it is an emerging field, one which doesn't fit neatly into any established academic discipline.

Researcher Kristie Ebi acknowledges: "It's a hidden issue. The fact that my bread doesn't have the micro-nutrients it did 20 years ago—how would you know?"

Some small shoots of research are

pushing through, but time is of the essence. As well as working to mitigate climate change, we must work to adapt to the climate change that is already happening.

This clearly now includes retooling crops to compensate for the nutritional collapse these fledgling studies have identified. It means grant money directed towards issues for the common good rather than commercial interest, and disciplines working together and sharing information.

## Bee populations

A footnote—a study was made of Goldenrod, a non-cultivated weed, whose pollen is important to bees preparing to go into winter. As a wild plant, it is relatively unaffected by fertilisers or human interference in terms of varieties. And there are samples dating back to 1842 in the Smithsonian Institute.

Researchers found that protein content has reduced by one third since then, which may help to explain the disastrous decline in bee populations, amongst other things.

• *This article is adapted from an original by Helena Bottemiller Evich, published in Politico in September 2017*