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# Scottish Socialist Voice

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by Ken Ferguson

**AS WE** enter the decisive stage of the campaign for a Yes vote capable of opening the way to a Scotland working for the interests of its people rather than a bunch of bloated city fat cats we need to be clear that this will be a battle about power.

And nobody is more aware of that fact than the web of legal, royal, political, military and financial interests which dominate the British state under the title of the “establishment”.

This nexus of power and wealth which exists to guarantee business as usual for the wealthy minority underpins the desperate determination to defeat Scottish independence and preserve the existing order.

For them the dangers posed by a Yes vote such as loss of bases for their nuclear weapons, possible eviction from the UN security council and lost oil revenues while important are less so than the prospect of the defeat of a British state fashioned, organised and run to serve their needs.

They will use all means at their disposal to avoid that defeat and independence campaigners need to understand this.

## Half truths

So far their chosen weapon the cross class Better Together has run months of scares and half truths from slower broadband to border posts in a frantic attempt to avoid serious debate about the real issues.

Of inestimable value in this has been to role played by “Scottish” Labour as the front man for a British state which is dominated by Tory ideas irrespective who occupies Downing Street. The spectacle of Alistair Darling

# Unionists back British state steeped in lies



**YOU'RE A TORY, DARLING:** Alistair rallying his Tory troops

being cheered by Scottish Tories who are universally detested by Scots voters and the decision by Labour to vote against free school meals is eloquent testimony of the consequences of sharing a bed, and political desires, with Tories and the wannabe Tories of the Lib Dems.

No wonder that their is a growing list of sickened former Labour loyalists coming out for Yes and a growing Labour campaign to back them.

However if Yes backers needed a reminder of the sub gutter depths that the British state will go to then they

need look no further than the released cabinet papers from the Thatcher regime 30 years ago. Few on the left will be surprised that the Thatcherites stockpiled coal before provoking a miners' strike or that despite denials at the time they did have a hit list of pits to close.

Nor is it a surprise that they planned massive spending cuts on anti-Tory Scotland only backing away when the likely political price became clear.

What the papers do tell us is that the British state, ably assisted by a supine media lied barefacedly to voters and ran a campaign of repression

and lies against the miners in order to defeat what they branded “the enemy within”.

They did the same – with help not just from the media but also Labour leader Neil Kinnock – to progressive councils such as the GLC and Liverpool daring to oppose them.

The central lesson that Yes campaigners must draw is simple but vital: the “honourable gentlemen” backing the British state lie and connive to defeat their enemies and right now the Yes campaign tops that list.

## Serial liars

From lies about going into the 1914 imperialist slaughter to defend “gallant little Belgium” to Blair's Iraq horror hunt of non-existent WMD, these are serial offenders.

However set against the power of media and money driving the No campaign we need to mobilise the voices of the Scottish people – particularly the working class majority – behind a Yes vote.

That can break their centuries old regime of power and privilege and shape a Scotland meeting the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of Scots for real change.

The battle will be intense but the prize priceless.

# The No campaign melts as people question 'strength' and 'security' of UK

by Alan Bissett

**HERE WE** are at the start of Scotland's great, historic year: 2014, everything building towards the watershed referendum on 14 September. The No campaign, so long used to a comfortable lead, are feeling their support steadily melt as more people start to question the supposed 'strength' and 'security' of the UK.

The positive case has been made forcibly by the Yes campaign. Our Unionist media concede this, even as they amplify the No campaign's attacks on our aspirations. What has given the Yes campaign momentum lately is the effect of more and more voters weighing a new start for Scotland against what's on offer from the Better Together campaign: precisely nothing.

If a voter is identifying at this stage as a 'Don't Know' – and there are enough of them to swing the balance – it means that independence to them is a vaguely attractive but evanescent concept, well-intentioned, but too much of an unknown in comparison to the familiar here and now of Britain.

## Right wing agenda

The Unionist parties have tried to play to this feeling, by using 'stability' of the pound, of defence, of economic size as their main selling-point. But even some No voters are starting to see this as yet another mask for a right-wing agenda. It should become the task of those in favour of independence to make Westminster's future for Scotland clear.

We must alert working people to reality: our industry, labour and resources have been catastrophically mismanaged by successive UK governments, in hoc to the whims of big business, to our long-term detriment.

Our oil – the vast extent of which was hidden from us by successive Tory and Labour governments – was used by Margaret Thatcher to underwrite the welfare bill caused by her vandalism of the UK economy. Scots found ourselves facing the indignity of having our own oil wealth used by a government we didn't vote for to decimate our industry.

The eventual result can be now witnessed in the opening of food banks in Glasgow, a looming homelessness crisis, rocketing energy costs and widespread poverty. Not only have the To-



**REASONS TO BE CHEERLESS:** food banks are now the norm under the unelected Tories

ries, Labour and the Lib Dems shown no will in dealing with these problems, each has exacerbated them when in power.

The pro-independence parties of the Scottish Socialists, the Greens and the SNP, while they disagree on vision, at least have plans to reverse this decline. The 'Better Together' campaign, bankrolled by Tories, corrupt interests and wealthy elites, sees Scotland as a political irrelevance, a mere supplier of oil receipts to the UK treasury, an exploitable resource or (in the case of Labour) a source of votes.

Retaining the status quo will be the minimum of its efforts: the stealth withdrawal of powers from Holyrood and cuts to Scotland's budget are its true objective.

Their threats have been cloaked by a compliant media, but various pronouncements from key figures have hinted strongly that if Scotland votes No the status quo is as good as we will ever have it. After all, we were promised rewards if we voted No to devolution in 1979. What we received was Thatcherism.

Scottish people are not stupid. Our aspirations – for ourselves, for our families and for our country – have not been matched reality. We are constantly reminded by the No campaign about supposed Britain's economic might and prosperity, while our living standards and job security continue to falter. The independence movement must not only confirm that the suspicions of Scots are correct – that only a super-rich minority benefit from

the current UK set-up – but also set out a powerful alternative. Pete Ramand and James Foley's forthcoming book *Yes: The Radical Case For Scottish Independence* is a very good place to start.

## True democracy

Under no illusions about either the British state or the capitalist intentions of the SNP leadership, it shows the way ahead for a true democracy in which workers and communities properly participate, a nationalised economy, based on Green energy, an oil fund, and a progressive taxation system which ensures that the wealthy – who currently enjoy tax avoidance at our expense – pay their way.

For socialists, we must make clear that independence alone will not solve Scotland's problems, as ours will still be a state, like any other, vulnerable to predatory capitalism. Backed, however, by the active participation of workers and a strong left programme, Scotland can meet this challenge.

We could go beyond even the good example of Nordic social democracy and adopt the successful, co-operative models of running industry found in Brazil and the Basque region of Spain, in which profits are reinvested in the communities which produced them.

We have nine months to persuade the people of Scotland that the UK economy is irredeemably broken and that a better way is possible. Let's make them count.



by Roz Paterson

**HAPPY NEW** year to all public transport users! Alas, your numbers are dwindling, as new figures show that two thirds of working Scots eschew buses and trains in favour of commuting by car, a depressingly downward trend in public transport usage at a time when the effects of climate change are literally on our doorsteps, and a serious change in travel habits is urgently required.

What could curb our addiction to the car – a method of transport that, though costing the environment and human health dearly, often works out cheaper than any other form of commute, thanks to the drop, year on year, in car running and ownership costs?

How about a rail network that had stations where we needed them, fares we could easily afford, a timetable that suited our needs, and a staff that were motivated by a sense of ownership as well as public service? A 'People's Railway', in other words.

I give you Professor Paul Salvesson, a former railway guard on the Settle-Carlisle line, now a writer, lecturer, and political activist, dubbed the 'Railway Professor' for his informed and sustained championing of a community-owned and run railway

# Is a people's co-op ScotRail possible?

network. Following his 2013 publication, *Railpolitik – Bringing Railways back to Communities*, Paul recently launched a report on ScotRail, and its potential as a cooperatively-run enterprise. Supported by Aslef, the Co-operative party, and SERA, the Socialist Environmentalist Resources Association, Paul's report advocates that communities, passengers and employees work together to shape a railway where profits are reinvested, rather than handed out to shareholders, and the network is owned by passengers/customers, like the Co-op; or by the workers, like the John Lewis Partnership; or by both, like the Mondragon co-op enterprise in the Basque country.

## For the people

Few people are going to argue with that; some 78 per cent, according to a recent Co-operative Party survey, support the idea of a railway run in the people's interests, as a public service, rather than as a business serving rich owners.

Well, apart from the Westminster government, of course, who are ideologically committed to the idea of privatisation, even when it flies in the face of the facts.

Take the East Coast Main line, currently run by the state-owned Directly Operated Railways (DOR), following the emergency decision by National Express to surrender the franchise due to 'poor trading conditions' within other areas of the NE group.

**Directly Operated Railways was the 'operator of last resort', yet has managed to generate £800million in profits since 2009 – every penny of which has gone to the Treasury**

DOR was the 'operator of last resort', yet has managed to generate £800million in profits since 2009, every penny of which has gone to the Treasury.

As well as being clearly competent, having outperformed all previous franchise-holders, DOR is a popular option with passengers, with a record-breaking level of customer satisfaction. Yet the government is determined to re-privatise the line, and soon, by the end of 2014 at the latest.

Says Paul: "DOR is a crisis mechanism, and we need a more stable, accountable body, not run by the UK government but operating at a devolved level."

## Franchise renewal

In other words, let's not wait for private franchisees to crash and burn, but agitate for something comprehensive at the outset.

Scotland's rail network comprises 350 stations, 2776km of track, 25 per cent of which is electrified, 60 per cent commuter, but stretching to Kyle of Lochalsh, Thurso and Mallaig, and incorporating some of the remotest, most scenic routes in Europe.

Paul proposes that the Scottish Government take control of the ScotRail franchise when it comes up for renewal in 2015.

As it is a franchise, taking control would not cost the tax-payer a penny, and would prove less expensive than the current model, which was subsidised to the tune of

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**ON THE RIGHT TRACK:** with independence, we could reverse the spectre of rail privatisation

£511million in 2013/14, despite the fact that none of the subsequent profits found their way into Scottish Government coffers.

However, Paul is not calling for a return to the monolithic state model of British Rail, which was run over the heads of both its employees and passengers.

Despite this, BR did engender a sense of public service amongst its staff, which has never quite gone and which could be revived, Paul believes, at the first whiff of co-operative values of ownership and community involvement/support.

If you examine the converse, for instance amongst hospital cleaners – formerly NHS workers and now employed by privately-run operatives – the sense of pride in their work, and of belonging, is lost, and with it some of the goodwill and loyalty engendered by such values.

Now look at Lothian Buses, which remains 100 per cent publicly-owned, the Edinburgh City Council holding 91 per cent of shares,

the others held by adjoining local authorities. It made £8million in profit in 2012, none of which went to private shareholders, and its focus is not profits but areas such as social inclusion, and breaking down barriers to young people using public transport.

Once the rail franchise was restored to public hands, we could work on devolving its management to a micro-level, involving workers, passengers and communities.

### Community hubs

If the workers are on board, experience suggests a more motivated workforce, less staff absence, better ideas and more commitment to making them workable.

If passengers are on board, you have more users, more fares paid, less traffic on the road. If communities are on board, you could have stations that are also community hubs, with shops, community centres, tourist information points, and so on.

Some of these ideas are already running, for instance in Beaulieu, in Inverness-shire,

the station that closed in 1960 was re-opened in 2002, and such was the community response that a 75 per cent reduction in commuter traffic was recorded.

A decade later, the station at Canon Bridge was re-opened, to ease congestion on the Kessock Bridge. In its first month, this tiny rural line operating a restricted timetable saw 2000 passenger journeys.

In Pitlochry, thanks to ScotRail's Adopt-a-Station scheme, empty station buildings now house a thriving second-hand bookshop and cafe, making it a stopping-off point for tourists and bibliophiles, as well as a welcome local amenity.

Not that such schemes should be left to voluntarism, which generally favour communities that are affluent. Rail management needs to reach out, and draw the community in.

Station management could overlap, for instance, with planning departments; why exactly do we not favour housing developments

around stations and other public transport hubs?

In an age of Peak Oil and climate change, the days of car-dependent urban sprawl are surely numbered.

If the government of the day baulks at government ownership, says Paul, then at least it could soften up the Invitation to Tender (ITT), by including a bias towards social benefits, not just 'efficient' operational costs.

To be fair, and Paul likes to be fair, the SNP's ITT is an improvement on its predecessors, taking up issues of lower fares, lower emissions, and investment, and extending an invitation to social enterprise bidders.

### Priced out

However, with regards to this latter, equality of opportunity must be matched with equality of support to take up this opportunity; in short, given that it costs about £10-12million just to make a bid, pretty much all social enterprises are priced out the market from the outset.

How about a wee grant for social enterprises, to enable them to make a viable bid?

He further urges that the ITT should propose a ten year contract for the successful bidder, and a 15 year one for the Sleeper service, to encourage long-term investment, and create stability.

A people's railway is not as out-of-reach as it may seem, and with independence, we would shake off the legacy of the Railways Act 1993, which inflicted privatisation on our rail network whether we liked it or not (we didn't).

With a will, and a vision such as Paul's, of cooperative values and progressive planning, we could at last be on the right tracks.

• See: [paulsalveson.org.uk](http://paulsalveson.org.uk)

by Paul Salvesson,  
General Secretary of the  
Hannah Mitchell  
Foundation

**SCOTLAND IS** changing – and it will drag the rest of the UK along with it, one way or another. Whatever the outcome of this year's referendum on independence, Britain will have changed, and changed quite utterly.

As a northern Englishman who spends some time in Scotland, it's impossible not to be amazed by the political ferment north of the border. Scotland is buzzing with ideas and radical thinking, and most of that – well, all of it to be honest – is coming from the Yes campaigners.

In contrast, the 'Better Together' parties seem to be relying on fear rather than any positive argument for Scotland remaining part of a reformed United Kingdom. It's just more of the same, with the promise that if Scots vote No they will get further devolved powers.

Scotland will make its mind up this September. But what of the left in England, and for that matter Wales: should we welcome an independent Scotland or see it as a slightly discourteous goodbye, consigning us to decades of Tory rule?

## Devolved powers

There's no doubt that Scotland leaving the UK would result in a huge boost to the Tories, giving them an almost certain in-built majority based on current arrangements. Wales has a degree of protection through its own (Labour-administered) Welsh Government and further powers are likely to be devolved.

The huge democratic deficit will be in the English regions, particularly the North and Midlands which have remained staunchly anti-Tory.

An independent Scotland could, you may argue, mean that the Tory-voting South will consign the Labour-inclined North and Midlands to permanent po-



litical exclusion. That's the conventional 'Labourist' view which sees politics as being about seats and voting patterns.

We shouldn't dismiss it lightly, but there is a broader issue for the radical democratic left. Scottish independence will send shock waves through the British political system resulting in consequences which we can only speculate upon.

It would potentially open the way for an independent Wales – a nation which, if anything, is even more anti-Tory than Scotland. It would certainly strengthen the position of Plaid Cymru, whose politics are closer to those of Chartist's than we may think.

A re-constituted Labour/Plaid coalition government which edges towards independence based on radical left of centre politics would further isolate England. And England is the big issue. It is not comparable in size or power to either Scotland or Wales. It has a population of over 53 million, compared to Scotland's 5.3 million and Wales' 3.1 million.

Its economic and political power, increasingly concentrated in the south-east, is enormous. It's laughable when the pro-English parliament lobby complains about 'poor little England' being bossed around by the horrid Scots and Welsh. We've been bossing them around – and much of the

rest of the world – for centuries.

Perhaps we are seeing the beginning of the end of John Bull's Great Britain. This is something that radical socialists, be they English, Welsh or Scots, should welcome.

A Yes vote for Scottish independence will force the pace of change south of the border. The current centralised governance, with power concentrated on London and the South-East, would not continue indefinitely. Change would come, not perhaps in a year or two but maybe over a decade. And that change, potentially, could lead to a democratic, federal British Isles in which not only England, Wales and Northern Ireland form part, but possibly Scotland and – who knows? – the Irish Republic. And London would no longer rule the roost.

Fundamental change must come to England, based on directly-elected regional assemblies and a reformed and re-energised local government. The two are closely related and the last three decades have seen the withering of local democracy across the UK. It is now entering what many

local government professionals see as terminal decline, with a perfect storm of government cuts, much fewer powers and voter turn-out to alarming levels of indifference. If the left is serious about developing a new, inclusive politics we have to develop a vision of a vibrant local and regional democracy which is open and dynamic.

The jury is very much open as to whether Labour will be able to position itself at the head of that movement, together with progressive Liberal Democrats, Greens, non-aligned radicals and partners in Scotland and Wales.

Based on its performance in Scotland so far, with its tribalism and reliance on a politics of fear, it doesn't look very likely. An even bigger problem is the Labour front-bench obsession with winning the 'southern' vote.

That's no bad thing in itself, but if it is based on neglecting its Northern base with a watered-down Blairism and a 'supermarket politics' that does little more than offer you savings on your next energy bill, it will fail.

## Powerful beast

English regionalism was described by the SNP's Chris Harvie as the dog that never barked. We could well be seeing the stirring of what is still very much a pup, but one that may grow into a powerful beast.

Scottish and Welsh devolution was driven as much by the threat of the SNP and Plaid Cymru breathing down Labour's neck as any sincere desire for decentralisation by Blair.

As yet, there is no threat from radical centre-left regional parties in England: but it might come to that. In the meantime, I'm hoping Scotland votes Yes.

• *This is a slightly revised version of an article published in Chartist December/January issue and is reproduced with permission of the editor. Paul's website is at: [www.paulsalvesson.org.uk](http://www.paulsalvesson.org.uk) The Hannah Mitchell Foundation is a non-sectarian campaign for North of England devolution, named in honour of an outstanding working class socialist, feminist and co-operator. See: [hannahmitchell.org.uk](http://hannahmitchell.org.uk)*



by Colin Fox

**THE 1.2** per cent growth in the UK economy heralded by Tory Chancellor George Osborne in his 'Autumn Statement' is unlikely to provide much relief for working people any time soon. That was the stark message from the Office for Budget Responsibility at New Year.

Their report on the state of the UK economy pointed out, among other things, that the purchasing power of average wages has fallen by 17 per cent in real terms since 2008 and shows no signs of recovery before 2017.

The average Scots family therefore faces a loss of £61 a week in median earnings compared to 2008 by 2018.

That dreary prospect ought to focus the minds of working class families across Scotland in the run up to September's independence referendum. Having spent the last five years stretching household budgets to cover soaring food prices, gas and electricity bills and transport costs they increasingly find they cannot make ends meet without resorting to further borrowing.

### Indebted families

Even those not yet relying on Wonga, Cash Converters, or Provident Cheques face increased pressure on repayments as wages tumble. Any rise in interest rates for millions of already indebted families could prove disastrous. And yet most economists forecast just such a rise sometime this year.

The OBR report also revealed the number of people in work and in poverty is now greater than the total of the unemployed and retired combined. And to add insult to injury the National Audit Office (NAO) warned households to expect above inflation increases in gas and electricity



PHOTO: Craig Maclean

## Winning workers to Yes is key to indy victory

bills for the next 17 years as energy companies recoup the cost of infrastructure investments from hard pressed customers. This at a time when one in three households in Scotland already suffer the misery of fuel poverty!

For the vast majority of Scots then their economic distress is not over, not by a long way. And with George Osborne also signalling a further £25billion in public spending cuts should the Tories be re-elected in 2015 falling living standards are likely to provide the decisive backdrop to this year's Scottish independence referendum. Nicola Sturgeon and Alistair Darling are agreed on that much at least.

The ongoing debate within the Yes camp over whether people are more likely to vote for independence if the economy is growing rather than declining is more nuanced than

any straight correlation might suggest because official figures indicate an upturn in the UK economy whereas the vast majority of people continue to experience a fall in their living standards. The SNP have long taken the view that an economic upturn is a prerequisite for a Yes vote. Others believe poorer economic conditions make it easier for many people to reject the status quo and the miserable prospects it foreshadows.

Alongside such economic factors determining the outcome of the referendum stands the prospect of another Tory government being elected at Westminster in 2015. And it is clear Cameron and Osborne will lay claims to have successfully steered the UK economy out of 'Labours disastrous recession'. So we can expect that message to be played over and over by

Tory spin-doctors throughout the year ahead. All the evidence clearly shows that support for independence will grow if another Tory government seems likely. The same progress can be expected if, as seems likely, UKIP emerges with the largest overall share of the European elections vote in England.

With support for Yes strongest amongst the working class and the poorest the Scottish Socialist Party clearly has a crucial role to play in convincing more of them they will be economically, socially and politically better off with independence. Ruling out another Tory government is a powerful reason why working class people should vote Yes.

So the key question is how do we convince and mobilise those as yet undecided working class Scots to vote Yes? Promising better jobs with improved pay and conditions, trade union membership, greater protection and public ownership of services like the Royal Mail is clearly one part of the answer for sure.

### Getting involved

The other part needs to make clear that working people like us get nothing without struggling for it. We need to persuade them therefore not only to vote Yes but also to get involved in the independence campaign itself to help shape the kind of independent Scotland that emerges from that positive result.

Together with the Radical Independence Campaign and the Yes side, the SSP must fully appreciate that of the many tasks confronting us in the next eight months uppermost is inspiring, energising and mobilising the Scottish working class behind our banner. That is the key to our victory in September.

by *Richie Venton*,  
*SSP national workplace  
 organiser*

# WORKERS FACE STARK CHOICES

**WORKING CLASS** people, the majority population of Scotland, face a stark choice this September. Vote NO to democratic self-government and get a renewed dose of attacks on jobs, wages, rights at work, benefits and public services from a Westminster regime emboldened by their success in seeing off any threatened 'Scots rebellion'.

Or vote Yes this year so that in 2016 and beyond we get the governments chosen by the working class majority, under a Proportional Representation system more in tune with voters' wishes, boosting the prospects of a government of the left, hastening the day when a radical socialist transformation of society banishes low pay, poverty, inequality and exploitation.

But nothing will be handed to us on a silver plate by the billionaires, bankers and business tycoons who currently rule the roost.

Working class people, trade unionists included, need to organise to shape Scotland's future... not just fighting for a Yes majority, but simultaneously forging the policies and measures that would decisively change the lives of the millions thereafter.

## No vote/Tory vote

The evidence is mounting that a No vote is a vote for Tory dictatorship over Scotland – a message that trade unionists and workers clinging onto their Labour loyalties would be wise to heed.

The anti-independence Better Together is blatantly Tory-funded whilst Labour-fronted.

They must have thought Christmas was a good time to bury bad news, but no Labour voter can afford to ignore the announcement of £1.3million in donations to Better Together by 19 obnoxiously wealthy individuals who are also longstanding donors to the Tory party.

People like Andrew Fraser, City of London stockbroker, former head of Barings Bank (before it

collapsed), and previously giver of £1million to the Tory party. He gave BT £200,000 to hold onto Scotland's wealth for his parasitic class. Hotel and whiskey tycoon Donald Houston gave them £600,000. London-based Deutsche Bank executive Ivor Dunbar donated £50,000. Another £20,000 was handed over by two leading figures from Hakluyt, the 'private intelligence' company with links to state spy-network MI6.

So bankers, capitalist chief executives and spies – none of them resident in Scotland – want to fund the Fear Factory that is Better Together, in a ruthless bid to terrorise the Scottish working class into leaving the rich elite's political puppets at Westminster in charge, to sustain the profiteering and exploitation of workers and natural wealth they currently enjoy. He who pays the piper calls the tune.

As veteran leading Labour figure, former Glasgow Provost and trade unionist Alex Mosson astutely said, "This roll-call of No campaign donors should come as no surprise to anybody who understands the vested interests at play.

"This should act as a wake-up call to everybody, especially those in the Labour Party, if they're kidding themselves that the No campaign is anything other than a Tory-led propaganda machine."

The other Yuletide pronouncements that should put the fear of god into any worker bamboozled into thinking of voting No was that of Tory Chancellor George Osborne.

His declaration of class war included a further £25billion cuts, over half of them to welfare benefits, with plans to abolish housing

benefits to the under-25s, slash Scotland's funding from Westminster through 'changes' to (or abolition of) the Barnett Formula, and target pensioners for cuts – a move previously seen as taboo, for fear of alienating the 'grey' vote.

That's the future if working class Scots fall for the No camp's scaremongering. If you'll forgive the 'musical' pun, it's not even the Status Quo, but One Direction – backwards!

## Labour panic

Some Labour Party and trade union officials who have done their members and supporters the unforgivable disservice of jumping into bed with the sworn Tory enemies of the working class are beginning to panic that traditional Labour voters have spotted their treachery.

They panic at polls showing one in five Labour voters already plan to vote Yes, and the growth of Labour for Independence, with several Labour veterans recently supporting independence.

Some union officials, like the GMB's Richard Leonard, are desperately seeking to distance themselves from the Tory-funded Better Together, because their own members are up in arms about Labour and many union leaders joining forces with the party of the bedroom tax and naked class war.

Gordon Brown has been wheeled out to breathe life into United for Labour, which in reality is the Labour wing of Tory-funded Better Together, but talks hypocritical platitudes about being 'united for social justice' in the UK.

Where was Gordon Brown, or BT's Labour poster boy Alistair Darling, when the last Labour gov-

ernment presided over escalating inequality, savage job and service cuts to fund the bankers' bailout, and continued use of hate-figure Thatcher's anti-trade union laws to cow workers into submission?

Labour has had decades to prove their claims that workers are 'better together' under Westminster rule, but the real-life results included rampant privatisation and profiteering (under New Labour), the most ruthless workplace repression in western Europe (by Blair's own admission/boast), the squandering of £1.3trillion of taxpayers' money to prop up the bankers and their bonuses, the worst levels of regional inequality (between the South East of England and the rest) of any EU country, and amongst the lowest wages, longest working week and poorest pensions in the whole of Europe.

That's Blair, Brown and Darling's heritage, and the future they offer workers in a Labour-run capitalist UK.

Sustained Tory or Tory-UKIP rule is an indescribable nightmare for the working class. But even the far-from-guaranteed prospect of a Westminster Labour government should fill workers with dread.

British Labour are beyond redemption, beyond the reach of trade unions or socialists trying to reclaim the party founded a century ago to represent the working class. The party that generations of workers put their faith in no longer exists.

And Scottish self-government is the only realistic route to reviving the founding principles of the labour movement pioneers, provided working class people get organised now to demand change after winning self-rule. That's





**HOPELESS: Ed Miliband and Johann Lamont – the ‘cream’ of an unelectable Labour Party**

where fighting for a Yes vote and for the longer term combine.

To win a majority of the working class for Yes requires a bold, dynamic vision of a new Scotland, one where the fabulous wealth of resources and skills are deployed to boost the living standards of millions.

This is a struggle for the hearts and minds of working class people, and the Yes campaign needs to tap into the deep seated traditions of hatred for unfairness, injustice and inequality in the soul of Scottish workers.

That’s where the fighting demands for change put forward by not only the SSP but also broad-based campaigns like Trade Unionists for Independence (TUI) become critical.

The Scottish SNP government’s White Paper has put the No camp on the run by exposing their complete lack of a clear vision of what would follow a NO vote. In contrast to their reliance on lies and scaremongering, the White Paper pledges numerous welcome reforms, such as childcare provision for all 3-4 year olds on a par with primary school hours; protection of pensions; defence of fee-free

university education; a 5 per cent cut to energy bills; encouragement and involvement of trade unions; rises in the minimum wage to match inflation; restoration of 90-day consultation on redundancies; renationalisation of Royal Mail; removal of Trident weapons...to name a few. But to win a Yes majority in the population that counts most – the working class – Yes Scotland should boldly go beyond these welcome promises.

And the SSP, TUI (which includes Labour for Independence trade unionists) and individual union branches have a critical role to play in popularising measures that could and should be carried out after a Yes vote.

### **Limited agenda**

Nobody expects a Coalition like Yes Scotland to embrace the entire socialist aims of the SSP, but they urgently need to go beyond the limited agenda put by their SNP component if they are to win the battle for the working class vote.

Rather than merely promising to inflation-proof the current pathetic £6.31 minimum wage (with far lower youth rates) Yes Scotland should spell out a vision of a

guaranteed living wage as the minimum for all at 16, without age discrimination.

In addition to public ownership of Royal Mail, they should highlight the opportunity for public ownership – at the very least – of our railways and energy companies to combat nauseating profiteering and the crime of fuel poverty.

And to expose the nightmare facing people at work if Westminster’s dictatorship of the rich is allowed to continue, Yes Scotland should as a bare minimum adopt a charter of workers’ rights.

These should include the right to join and organise unions without fear of victimisation or blacklisting; legal guarantees for elected union representatives to function during works time to represent members; an end to state interference in the running of union affairs and internal elections; abolition of fees for Employment Tribunals; a constitutional right to strike and removal of the ban on solidarity action.

By putting forward measures to lift the climate of fear in workplaces, allowing unions to function independently of employers and the government, Yes Scotland could give 630,000 trade union members

and countless other non-members a glimpse of a new Scotland where they would be profoundly better off.

Whilst calling on the umbrella Yes Scotland to travel this route, trade unionists should and will champion such policies as part of organising to shape Scotland’s future in the interests of its working class majority.

That is why all of us should celebrate the overwhelming decision by the Scottish conference of the Left Unity formation in the biggest civil and public service union, PCS, to campaign for independence – which SSP members in the union played a major part in achieving.

That is why Trade Unionists for Independence, embracing workers from several parties and none, has a major part to play and is stepping up its efforts to reach workplaces.

That is why the SSP – which is uniquely placed as the only party to have fought for an independent socialist Scotland for the past 15 years – is determined to pick up the banner trampled in the muck by the Tory-collaborating Labour leaders.

### **Tax the rich**

Our vision of an independent Scotland goes miles beyond the timid reforms advocated by the SNP leadership, as we champion taxation of big business and the rich; democratic public ownership of the major industries, services and banking; a socialist democracy where working class people gain the full fruits of their labour instead of being stripped of living standards and rights so the bankers and billionaires can amass obscene profits.

Working people, traditionally many of them Labour voters, face a stark choice. Socialists have a duty to help clarify that choice, show how a Yes vote can kick open the door to radical socialist change, whereas a No vote would condemn them to the jailhouse conditions suffered by millions in a capitalist Britain where different factions of Tory ideology are all that’s on offer.

The Scottish Socialist Party is determined to help workers reach that conclusion and to organise to shape Scotland’s future.

by Isobel Lindsay,  
chair of the Alternative  
1914 Commemoration  
Committee

## ALTERNATIVE VIEW OUTLINED AS WW1 JINGOISM GROWS

**ON NEW** Year's Day someone passed me a picture of the new two-pound coin and my comment was that it was a National Collective stunt.

The hideous recruiting poster designed to pressurise young men to sign away their lives was such a much-derided symbol that it was hard to believe that the representatives of the British state could select this as opposed to many other more dignified images.

But as David Cameron and Michael Gove have shown, never underestimate the crude jingoism of Great Britain. Cameron's slip in talking about "celebrating the start of World War One like the Jubilee" was an indication of their political strategy. They may have miscalculated.

We set up the Alternative WW1 Commemoration Committee to help tell the real story to people in Scotland today, not many of whom will still have family memories.

### Profound impact

Proportionately, Scotland suffered greater losses than any other countries except Serbia and Turkey. Over 26 per cent of the Scots who went to war died and this was around 11 per cent of males of fighting age. The equivalent figure for Britain as a whole and Ireland was over 11 per cent of those mobilised dying which was 6 per cent of the fighting age males. This is not to suggest some competition about our pain being greater than your pain but to illustrate the particularly profound impact of the war here.

This was a war of competing imperialist powers. The dominant imperial powers of Britain and France wanted to keep their position while Germany wanted to grow its own empire. Tsarist Russia, France and Britain were



**PROFOUND IMPACT:** over a quarter of Scots who went to war died

in an alliance to contain Germany and Germany was eyeing up possible spoils in Africa. Virulent supporters of empire like Cecil Rhodes and the press baron, Lord Northcliffe, whipped up anti-German hysteria for years before the war.

Northcliffe, owner of the Daily Mail and many other papers, was put in charge of Government propaganda when the war started. Nothing much changes.

One of our main tasks will be to introduce the present generation to the outstanding figures in Scottish political history who led the opposition to the war. Their sacrifice, their passion and their campaigning skills make many of today's political activists look anaemic in comparison.

Some of the men are still fairly well-known but the role of the women is less so. Keir Hardie was heart-broken when, despite his best efforts, the majority in the Labour Party backed the war. The Independent Labour Party, however, took a very different stance, especially in Scotland, and played the leading role in the

anti-war campaign. For anyone with a Scottish Labour movement background, such names as John Wheatley, Jimmy Maxton, John Maclean, David Kirkwood, Patrick Dollan are in the political DNA.

They showed outstanding courage in facing down the pro-war jingoism. But their role was equalled by the women campaigners. Crystal Macmillan was one of the leading organisers of the Women's International League which in 1915 brought together over a thousand women delegates from all over Europe and the US to promote a negotiated settlement to the war.

Macmillan was one of the representatives sent to meet heads of various European countries and the USA to try to get them to take the initiative in starting negotiations. The 'Great Glasgow Three' – Mary Barbour, Helen Crawford and Agnes Dollan – organised demonstrations at the start of the war, the rent strikes during it and started the Women's Peace Crusade which had 100 branches by the end of the war.

The ILP's anti-war stance should have damaged it but by the end of the war its membership in Scotland had trebled and its branches doubled. This did not happen in England. An English ILP leader suggested that anti-war feeling was more energetic and aggressive in Scotland. In the election in 1922, ILP candidates won ten out of the 15 seats in Glasgow.

The establishment story will be about great patriotic sacrifice. Our story is about wasted lives and terrible outcomes. It was certainly not the 'war to end wars'. On the contrary it was WW1 and the Treaty at its end which created the conditions for the rise of Hitler and WW2.

### Middle East

The very punitive sanctions imposed on Germany and its complete humiliation left a broken economy and extensive starvation. But the British Empire did well out of the war.

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France carved up the Middle-East for themselves with no references to the people living there. Many of the current problems in that region go right back to these colonial powers drawing artificial lines on a map with no cultural concerns.

We had a successful 'Dangerous Women' conference in November to promote the work of the anti-war women. We are trying to get Glasgow City Council to place a plaque to commemorate those who opposed the war.

We are having an event on 21 March on the anti-war poets and novelists. We will be planning other activities and we want people in their various organisations to take every opportunity to tell the real story of the war.

# Campaigning at Edinburgh Uni

by Calum Martin,  
*Edinburgh University SSP*

**UNIVERSITIES** have long proven their ability to function as hotbeds of political activities, and Scotland's universities are no exception to this. As the referendum campaigns continue to heat up, Yes campaigning at Edinburgh University has stepped up a notch this year, the highlight of this being a Yes meeting held on Tuesday 3 December, a meeting the SSP were instrumental in organising.

This year marks a substantial boost to SSP activities at Edinburgh University with the establishment in August of the Edinburgh University SSP Society (EUSSPS), and it was in conjunction with counterparts from the Edinburgh University SNP society (or Edinburgh University Scottish Nationalist Association, EUSNA) that this meeting was organised.

## Real success

This was the first Yes meeting held on the Edinburgh campus, and it proved to be a real success. The total audience reached nearly 40 people – substantially more than the 30 seats organisers had initially provided – fairly evenly split between Yes and undecided voters. This ratio would change before the end of the meeting.

With SSP Edinburgh University branch secretary Calum Martin co-chairing the meeting, representing the SSP on the panel was Paolo Caserta who strongly put forward the case for an independent Socialist Scotland, focused on 'Why



**A POSITIVE SIGN:**  
Edinburgh University  
has now become  
home to a very  
potent Yes group

working people will be better off with independence', economically, socially and politically with a Yes vote next year.

The warmth of the response by the student audience to this progressive case was clear from the outset, when Paolo's opening point, that supporting the right of nations to self-determination does not make you a nationalist, it makes you a democrat, was instantly met with solid applause from the floor.

From this point he continued, elaborating on why Scots will be better off with independence by pointing out "that our standards of living have been dramatically declining in the last few years thanks to measures implemented by the Westminster government, such as the infamous Bedroom Tax, designed to make working class people pay for a crisis that was caused by the recklessness of greedy bankers and the ineptitude of corrupt politicians and that as the Prime Minister was calling for "permanent austerity" all the signs pointed to a further decline in our living conditions"; and proceeded that "we need the powers to properly address the inequities that blight our

nation, like the fact that thousands of families are now being forced to rely on food banks because they cannot longer afford to feed themselves, and these powers will only come with independence".

Further presenting the SSP case "to build an independent socialist Scotland that is not only at peace with itself but also with its neighbours and the rest of the world", free from both WMDs and illegal wars, the audience grew only more supportive.

## Fuel poverty

Indeed as Paolo concluded, stating that without our resources being "siphoned off to the Treasury in London we could eradicate the indignity of fuel poverty that sees one in three household in Scotland having to choose between eating or heating", and that further, "we can create new jobs, ending exploitation of working people by scrupulous employers and gradually reaching full employment; we can improve our infrastructure, health care, social care and education," it was clear how well received the SSP case for independence was.

By the end of the meeting, another poll reveal just how much the numbers had changed when presented with the case for Independence. The number of undecided voters had halved, the audience having swung in favour of independence.

To see such numbers of students turning out at the height of exam season to hear the case for independence is undoubtedly a good sign for the supporters of a Yes vote, and to see the change in attitude amongst the audience is testament to the strength of the case for independence.

The progress so far of the Edinburgh University SSP Society is substantial, and can be counted to include the establishment of weekly street stalls, leading to healthy signs of growth and increasingly regular and well attended society meetings.

Thanks to the strength of the SSP here, by working alongside the SNP and other Yes campaigners, Edinburgh University has now become home to a very potent Yes group. A group EUSSPS shall be at the forefront of, carrying forth our message of an independent socialist Scotland.





by Campbell Martin

**THE FIRST** Labour Government, led by Scotsman Ramsay MacDonald, went down to a heavy defeat in the General Election of October 1924, having served little more than ten months in office.

Labour's failure to represent the interests of the working class – claiming to be a national government rather than a class government – had been a massive disappointment to millions of workers the length and breadth of the country who were then faced with the return of a Tory Government, and one with its largest parliamentary majority in 50 years.

## Bosses cuts

The government, led by Stanley Baldwin, took the decision to return Britain to the Gold Standard, an index by which the value of the pound could be measured.

This, combined with the return of mines to private ownership, resulted in the so-called leaders of industry, the bosses, demanding cuts to workers' wages and longer hours, in order, they claimed, to make their businesses and the national economy 'more competitive'.

Miners were faced with reductions to wages that would have taken pay-rates

# 1926 General Strike showed both bravery and betrayal

to below 1914 levels, before the outbreak of the First World War. When miners understandably refused to accept this, owners locked them out of the pits.

At this point, the Tory Government stepped-in, setting up a Commission under Sir Herbert Samuel, which was tasked with examining pay-rates and working-hours in the mining industry.

In reality, however, the Commission's main purpose was to buy breathing space for the government and mine-owners to prepare for an inevitable strike.

To little surprise, the Samuel Commission report of March 1926 included recommendations to slash miners' wages by up to 13

per cent and increase the working day.

Workers were united and determined to resist what was clearly a co-ordinated attack, not just on the miners but on the working class.

However, trades union leaders and the Labour Party took the position that pay-cuts were a fair exchange for reorganisation and continued employment in the future – a Trades Union Congress (TUC) official was infamously quoted at the time, describing the miners' position of "not a penny off the pay, not a second on the day" as a "mere slogan" that would "get them nowhere".

The TUC General Council and Special Industrial Committee spent six weeks in desperate negotiations with bosses and Tory Government officials trying to avert a strike.

On 30 April 1926, mine-owners laid down their final demands, which for miners in Scotland would have meant a wage cut from 9/4d a day to

7/6d plus an extra hour on a daily shift. A special miners' conference rejected the new terms.

The following day, May 1st, a state of emergency was declared by the government in preparation for a general strike, with the introduction of an Organisation of Maintenance and Supplies (OMS) tasked with breaking the strike and keeping supplies moving.

## Troops

The Tory Government had used the nine-month duration of the Samuel Commission to put in place its strike-breaking plan, including the movement of troops to areas expected to be affected.

All of this was in place before the General Council of the TUC finally voted to back a general strike, with effect from midnight on Monday, 3 May 1926.

The solidarity between strikers and the general public was resolute: in Glasgow, strike-breakers of the OMS, many of them

**“The actions of union leaders were deemed to be an unconditional surrender, a betrayal of the workers who took strike action and of the public who supported them...”**



**PROPER SOLIDARITY:** but union leaders would betray the workers who took strike action and the public who supported them

students, were frequently attacked. On 6 May a miners' picket marched on a tram depot in Ruby Street in an attempt to prevent 'scab' labour from operating the transport system.

However, the miners found the premises occupied by police who attacked with batons drawn, resulting in what was described at the time as 'a fierce battle'.

Strikers and supporters who were arrested found themselves sentenced to harsh, relatively long terms in prison. Meanwhile, the Tory

Government in London sent seven naval ships to the Clyde, with sailors used as additional labour for the OMS.

In addition to the miners, workers from the railways and other areas of transport took part in the first wave of strike action, along with those from the building industry, steel plants and printing.

Incredibly, though, shipbuilding and engineering workers – the backbone of working class Clydeside – were designated by trades union leaders in London as the 'second line'.

Just four days into the strike – at a time when the determination and commitment of strikers was growing even stronger – the negotiating committee of the Trades Union Congress in London met with Sir Herbert Samuel.

## Betrayal

The meeting took place without the knowledge of strikers and just as shipbuilding and engineering workers downed tools.

Samuel proposed what was effectively a rehash of

his Commission's earlier proposals and, incredibly, the TUC accepted what was offered.

Against the wishes of the miners, the General Council of the TUC called-off the strike and, on 12 May, they informed Tory Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin that the strike was over.

At the time, and to this day, the actions of union leaders were deemed to be an unconditional surrender, a betrayal of the workers who took strike action and of the public who supported them.



## Join the SSP here

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

Or telephone: 0781 126 5388

Or see our website: [www.scottishsocialistparty.org](http://www.scottishsocialistparty.org)

- ☐ I would like to join the Scottish Socialist Party
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by Sandra Webster

# SSP free school meals policy impacts Holyrood in 2014

**THE PAST** week has once again demonstrated what is wrong with our current parliamentary system. Introducing free school meals to all primary one to three children should be something that is welcomed on both sides of the political divide.

Johann Lamont's Scottish Labour Party and their obsession to end universal benefits staggered once again into the headlights when they said they would vote against the policy announced by Alex Salmond.

Even press sympathetic to the Labour Party were quick to condemn their actions. It is yet another exercise in self-flagellation by a Scottish Labour Party who seem more and more out of touch with their traditional voters.

## End freebie stigma

Lamont has consistently spoken about "the need to target help where it is most needed" and thus has decided Labour will vote against the SNP policy. Universality would mean an end to stigma and it would be cheaper and simpler to administer. We are used such tactics. The SSP have always been at the forefront of a campaign for universal school meals alongside charities such as the Child Poverty Action Group.

The Scottish Government in its White Paper laid out plans for childcare they claim can be transformative free schools meals for all of our children could have even more benefi-

cial effects. The present school meals are mostly heated up from processed foods in a central kitchen. It is then chilled and sent out to various schools and then reheated. Not very appetising at the beginning and even worse when they are dished up on the lunch plate.

Managers not chefs and cooks number crunch the costs with nutritional value coming further down the scale.

This is a subject though that seems to have caught the imagination of many people in social media who have called for a return to cooking and baking happening at an individual school, where children can learn where food comes from.

A health diet can also lead to health benefits and encourage all children from all backgrounds to have a healthy hot meal at

least once a day. For some children this may be the only access they have to a hot meal.

Austerity is not only impacting on the children of people on benefits both in and out of work, but even families who are seen to be more well off.

Universality would mean a hot meal for everyone no questions asked. So why would the Labour Party decide to vote against it?

The Christmas period is behind us but in the film *Miracle on 34th Street*, shops learned that by advertising their rivals' wares, consumer confidence grew in their own shops.

If only this could be a lesson learned in Scottish and UK politics. A little fairy dust of common sense. Where politicians of every persuasion could get behind good ideas

and if even not feel able to vote in favour of them at least abstain in a vote against.

However with the referendum looming and Labour's intent to maintain the status quo, similar behaviour is going to be expected. It seems as the SNP try to present themselves as moving further to the left, New Labour are being forced into the vacuum of more right wing territory left behind.

Winning hearts and minds will equate into votes for Yes in the independence referendum. We hope that voters will want a change and won't vote for a party who voted against such a sensible promise of a free lunch for more children.

## Votes Labour's lost

The only losers will be the Labour Party and their credibility with their traditional voters. The door is now open for groups such as Labour For Independence to give their perspective.

This move is the first step in the right direction and is evidence of how the work of SSP MSPs who originally campaigned for universal free school meals has impacted on today's Scottish Parliament. We need a different system and the end of the two party system that Holyrood was designed to prevent.



PHOTO: Jo Hanvie

# CAMPAIGN ANNOUNCES CUBAN FIVE COMMISSION DETAILS

**THE CUBA** Solidarity Campaign has announced the latest details of the International Commission of Inquiry into the case of the Cuban Five as well as several associated events to be held in London on 7 and 8 March. René González, the first and only member of the Cuban (Miami) Five to have been released after completing his 15 year sentence in the United States, has announced that he will come to London to give evidence. He will be joined by fam-

ily members of the Five, victims of terrorism against Cuba, lawyers, politicians and campaigners from Cuba and across the world, including Alice Walker, Pulitzer Prize winning author of the *Color Purple* and former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark. The Commission will hear testimony from around 20 key witnesses including US defence attorney Martin Garbus, representatives from international human rights organisation Amnesty Interna-

tional, and from Miami Five family members including wives of the Five, Olga Salanueva and Elizabeth Palmeiro. There will be testimony from specialists on the range of measures taken to defend Cuba against the threat of terrorist attacks, as well as testimony from Cuban and international victims of US based terrorism.

• To find out more and book tickets go to: [voicesforthefive.com/commission](http://voicesforthefive.com/commission)



# END TO FIGHTING IS FIRST PRIORITY IN SOUTH SUDAN

by Bill Bonnar

**THE CURRENT** conflict in South Sudan shows that the process of nation building can be difficult and complex. Faced by regular incursions from the North it is currently engulfed in a tribal conflict which threatens the very integrity of the new state.

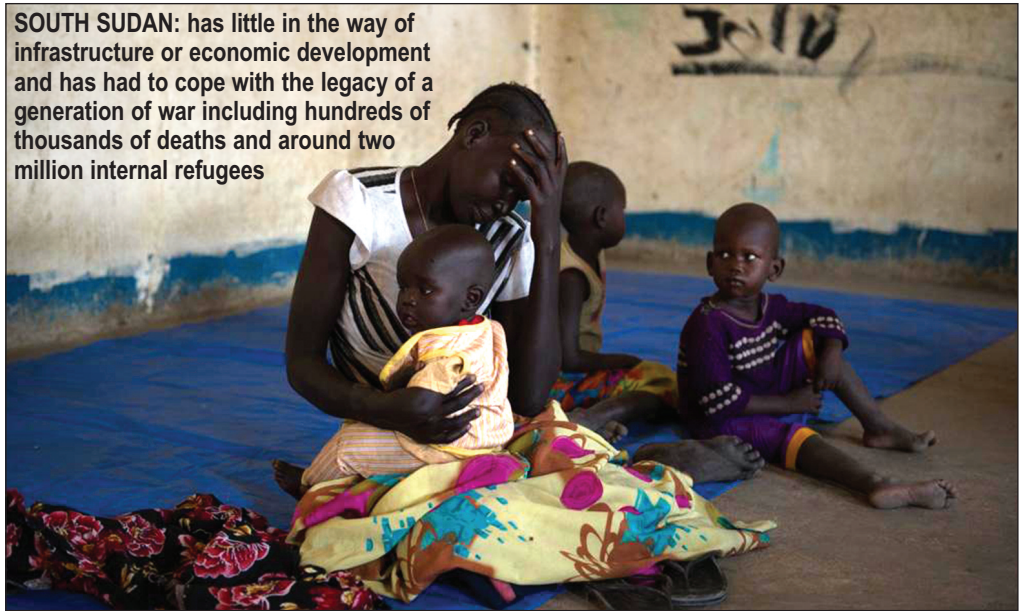
South Sudan became an independent state two years ago after a long liberation war against the North. A vast country it has little in the way of infrastructure or economic development and has had to cope with the legacy of a generation of war including hundreds of thousands of deaths, around two million internal refugees and a government in the North which actively promoted ethnic division as part of a divide and rule strategy.

## Diverse regions

The country is made up of three diverse regions; Dhar El Ghazal, Equatoria and Greater Upper Nile which often have allegiance to specific tribal groups; the largest of which are the Dinka and Noer. The Dinka are the most numerous and homogenous of the tribes. United by religion (Christian) and official language (English); they formed the backbone of the liberation struggle and were the core of the Sudan People's Liberation Army.

The Noer are the largest of a range of other tribal groups who fear that South Sudan is beginning to resemble a Dinka state. Tensions came to a head when the Vice President, Reik Machar, from the Noer tribe, was accused of trying to stage a coup against the current President Kitt Matardit. This triggered a major

**SOUTH SUDAN:** has little in the way of infrastructure or economic development and has had to cope with the legacy of a generation of war including hundreds of thousands of deaths and around two million internal refugees



outbreak of violence with troops loyal to both sides involved.

The sides are heavily armed with modern weaponry and the conflict, if not contained could spread to neighbouring states. At the time of writing peace talks are taking place in Ethiopia although events on the ground are moving much faster than the talks. Many parts of the country are dividing along tribal lines with thousands killed and around 250,000 people displaced. In part the fighting is aimed at creating advantage on the ground ahead of peace talks although in a country lacking in any kind of infrastructure this implies a degree of co-ordination and control which rarely exists.

Much of what is now happening appears to be beyond the reach of the leadership of the warring groups. The Sudan People's Liberation Army might have won the war against the North but has struggled to win the peace. Under the charismatic leadership of its former president, John Garange, it sought to be inclusive and progressive; a model for the future state.

Garange was killed in mysterious circumstances in a helicopter crash in 2006 and since then the SPLA has struggled to contain ethnic divisions. It has also increasingly come under American influence. Washington has one eye on a potential regional ally and another on the country's extensive oil reserves. While the SPLA has moved to the right since John Garang's death shedding some of its earlier progressive baggage in exchange for American dollars the left does have a growing voice and influence in the country in the form of the Communist Part of South Sudan.

## Communist MPs

It is worth pointing out that up until the military coup which banned the party in 1989 the Communist Party had a number of MPs including the MP for Juba; the current South Sudan capital. In the current conflict, the party has been highly critical of the SPLA, accusing it of abandoning its previous role as liberation movement, allowing ethnic division to fester,

and of being mired in corruption and incompetence.

Instead they propose a programme of progressive nation building which rises above ethnic division, promotes democracy and human rights, argues the country's huge potential wealth should be used for the benefit of the people and seeks to find allies loyal to the more progressive traditions of African liberation.

The positive news is that the leadership of both sides, having stared into the abyss, appear to want a negotiated solution. This is also true of neighbouring states; particularly Uganda, fearful that the conflict might spread beyond South Sudan. The key is bringing a halt to the fighting before it arrives at a point of return.

• *Bill Bonnar worked in Sudan up until the 1989 military coup. A member of the Sudanese Communist Party, he lived mostly in the Darfur Region and visited what is now South Sudan on a number of occasions*

# BANISH THE BEDROOM TAX IN 2014

by *Richie Venton*

## FUTURE HISTORIANS

will brand 2013 the year of the Bedroom Tax. Anyone with a conscience will include it's abolition in their New Year resolutions. And this vicious assault on society's poorest, including sick and disabled people, descended into chaos as Hogmanay marked the end of a year scarred by increased poverty and Tory benefits theft.

The Westminster government failed to amend previous housing legislation when they implemented the Bedroom Tax, leaving a loophole that exempts all tenants who have lived in the same home since 1996.

This was first spotted in a Tribunal in Exeter city, where they've found 4.5 per cent of all the tenants hit by the Bedroom Tax are not liable to pay it, and are therefore due a full refund on payments made.

## Little victory

One housing expert has calculated at least 40,000 tenants across the UK stand to gain the return of the money they scrimped, saved and suffered to fork out in Bedroom Tax instalments... a figure he describes as "a conservative estimate". On average they should get back £640.

To add spice to this small victory against the upper-class Tory/Lib Dem thugs and thieves, some of the same tenants were awarded

Payments to help them meet the Bedroom Tax deductions, and they will be allowed to keep the DHP payments!

But far more serious, indeed absolutely heartbreaking, is the fact these Tory animals pushed through a tax on the poorest that forced thousands of people to go without proper heating or food, compelled many of them to uproot themselves and move house and, in the most tragic cases, to end their lives in poverty, stress and despair... when all along they were not even legally liable to pay.

## Blood on their hands

Disabled Solihull grandmother Stephanie Bottrill walked out in front of a lorry on the M6 last May, leaving a note for her son saying "Don't blame yourself for me ending my life. The only people to blame are the government".

Stephanie couldn't take the stress of a £20 a week cut to her pitiful benefits income.

But she wasn't even liable, as she'd been a tenant since 1995 in the home she was then hammered for living in – by millionaires living in mansions. Her son Steven has rightly accused Tory Iain Duncan Smith of having his mother's blood on her hands.

Anti-Bedroom Tax campaigners need to assist tenants in claiming their legal exemption and full refunds of payments made – rapidly! Because the cynical Tories have declared their intent to



## TAX VICTIM:

**Stephanie Bottrill took her own life after the Coalition's vicious tax robbed her of £20 out of her pitiful benefits**

swiftly close the legal loophole. Labour politicians have rightly condemned this. But they are overwhelmingly two-faced charlatans, considering it was Labour in government in 2008 which invented the diluted forerunner to the Bedroom Tax for private sector tenants; it was the same Labour Party which did sweet FA to outlaw evictions or even promise to scrap it for six months after it was implemented; and 47 Labour MPs (including ten from Scottish constituencies) didn't

even think it a serious enough issue to bother turning up to vote for a Labour Motion to abolish the Bedroom Tax which we had pounded them into lodging in parliament in November.

The SSP and other anti-Bedroom Tax campaigners are determined to bury this vicious Tory tax on the poorest.

We can't afford to wait until after the 2015 Westminster elections in the hope of possibly getting a Labour government to scrap it – nor until 2016 for an independent Scottish Government to rid us of this daylight robbery. Pledge to make 2014 the year we banish the Bedroom Tax.