

Get tae frack! public opposition to fracking grows as activists take on the energy giants in Scotland
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Shaping Scotland: Parliamentary motion supports Voice Forum
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Scottish Socialist Voice

- **70% of North Sea Oil workers back independence**

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CAMERON ALL AT SEA AS PROJECT FEAR OIL SCARE FLOPS



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by Roz Paterson

PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO FRACKING IS GROWING

THE GROUNDSWELL of opposition to fracking, the latest and most desperate bid to suck every last milligram of fossil fuel from the planet, is becoming as momentous as the mini-earthquakes created by the process itself. Long-term polling shows public support is increasingly faltering, while the UK government's initiative to allow local authorities to retain 100 per cent of business taxes from fracking operations, as opposed to the usual 50 per cent, is clearly seen as the blatant bribing of austerity-hit councils it so surely is.

Be in no doubt, fracking – or hydraulic fracturing – is not just a problem for a handful of luckless communities sitting on natural gas and coal reserves. It's everyone's problem. Fracking contaminates drinking water, depletes water reserves, causes harmful toxins and carcinogens to enter the food chain, accelerates global warming and keeps us hooked on fossil fuels when we should, and most of us want to, concentrate on sustainable, renewable forms of energy production.

Energy scramble

As we know, the sun is setting on the age of cheap oil, hence the scramble by major energy corporations for so-called 'unconventional' sources of energy. One such is fracking, for shale gas and, in Scotland, coalbed methane. This latter is a process to recover methane trapped in coal seams, through pumping vast quantities of water into them, to force the gas out, or by fracking the seam – that is, subjecting it to intense pressure, using chemicals and water, till it cracks open – to release the gas.

Also underway in the UK is underground coal gasification, whereby fracking is used to reach coal in seams that are too deep or fractured or thin to be reached by conventional mining. Once located, the seam is set on fire, but the oxygen supply is controlled to ensure the coal is only partially burnt, releasing carbon monoxide rather than carbon dioxide, which is brought to the surface. It is then burnt to produce energy, in a process reminiscent of that



FRACKING FURY: mobilisation gets stronger

PHOTO: via Frack Off Scotland

used to produce the notorious 'town gas' of the late 19th century, which lit up the streets but laid waste to whole swathes of the urban environment. Because, of course, carbon monoxide is not the only thing that reaches the surface. According to the website of leading protest group Frack Off, a 'witches' brew of toxic and carcinogenic coal tars' is also unleashed on the unsuspecting environment, leaching into groundwater, releasing 'horrendous' levels of CO2 emissions into an already overloaded atmosphere and contaminating the soil for generations to come.

Consider the case of Taylorville, Illinois, where town gas ceased production in the 1930s, yet in 1985 a 'clean-up' operation of the former industrial site released a geyser of carcinogenic contaminants into the wider environment, resulting in at least seven local children contracting neuroblastoma, a cancer of the central nervous system, and triggering one of those clumsy, local government cover-ups that exploded in their faces in the form of law-suits, sickening publicity and millions of dollars of wasted public cash.

Or the case of Centralia, Pennsylvania, where the fires were lit in the underground coal seams as long ago as 1962, in a bid to extract the

gas. Those fires are still burning, and will continue to do so for an estimated 250 years, and the town, with its cracked pavements and toxic air, is now all but abandoned.

These kinds of scenario go hand-in-hand with fracking, and won't be restricted to a mere smattering of locales. Because the gas is so hard to extract, many more wells need to be dug to extract it, compared to conventional gas extraction – hundreds, as opposed to dozens – resulting in a catastrophic industrialisation of our already shrinking countryside.

It's not a new technology, having been utilised in the North Sea oil and gas fields since the 1970s, but wasn't used onshore till 2007. After some initial fracking ops, work was suspended because of minor earth tremors in the surrounding areas.

However, the seismic risk was pronounced minimal, and fracking was given the go-ahead – this time, on an industrial scale. But the report which greenlighted fracking rather conveniently, for the major corporations with vested interests, overlooked other, perhaps more pressing concerns, from air pollution to toxins detected in the fat of cattle grazing near fracking sites.

For instance, benzene is one of the chemicals used in the fracking

process. Benzene is not nice. Even the American Petroleum institute which, as its name suggests, is on the side of the guys with the petrodollar signs in their eyes, states 'it is generally considered that the only absolutely safe concentration for benzene is zero.' In Queensland, Australia, at the Cougar Energy plant at Kingaroy, fracking was conducted for five days in 2010. The subsequent discovery of benzene and toluene in the groundwater, and in the fat of cattle, eventually led to the plant being ordered to be shut down.

Chillingly, the companies who are in this business in the UK are allowed to keep the results of their fracking confidential for four years, and it is, in any case, a business as poorly regulated as the British nuclear power industry, now infamous for its blow-outs, cover-ups and all-round contamination scandals. But David Cameron and his government are so hell-bent on fracking the frack out of the UK, they have even invited Total, the French fracking company, to drill here. Because they are banned from doing it in France.

Mobilisation

But the opposition is there, and growing. And everything the government does to facilitate fracking, from fast-tracking planning to manipulating laws to restrict people's right to protest, the mobilisation against it gets angrier, and stronger, as evidenced at Barton Moss, in Salford, where protesters have now set up camp, and are digging in, despite every effort to remove them.

We are waking up to this world gone mad, where, as seen on a YouTube clip now going viral, living near a fracking site means you can light up your tap water, yes, water, with a match, such is the level of methane it now comprises.

Frightening? Fracking frightening, you could say.

by Stephanie Pride

CONCERNED communities in Falkirk are fighting back against plans by unconventional energy giant Dart to turn the district into the UK's first commercial coalbed methane site.

Although initial plans are for just 22 new wells, the company owns a licence block that covers 367 square kilometres of central Scotland which could yield up to 600 billion cubic feet of the gas, it boasts.

Environmental campaigners warn this could lead to the creation of more than 600 new wells on both sides of the Forth – many with a short production life, potentially ending in fracking.

So what, exactly, does the extraction of coalbed methane involve and how does it differ from fracking?

Coalbed methane is a form of gas trapped inside coal seams and is one of a number of sources of 'unconventional gas' that the energy industry is turning to as conventional fossil fuels run out. Instead of pumping in large volumes of water to release the gas, coal seams are de-pressurised by pumping out vast amounts of contaminated water and disposing of it.

Toxic materials

Locally, the plan is to dump all produced water into the Firth of Forth via an outfall pipe after minimal treatment – around 80,000 gallons of water which can be up to five times as salty as seawater and contain a variety of toxic and radioactive materials.

Dart Energy, whose test wells in Airth have already been in production for some years, are keen to emphasise that this is not fracking. Yet in many cases in Australia, they have used this technique to enhance production, and the company has a half-share in the licence to extract shale-gas locally.

"Regardless of whether they are fractured, CBM wells are associated with a similar litany of

Concerned communities fight Falkirk coalbed methane plans



WHAT, IN AIRTH? a public enquiry is due to take place in March. Local campaign group Falkirk Against Unconventional Gas (FAUG) will be calling on expert witnesses to oppose the plans

PHOTO: via Frack Off Scotland

negative impacts to shale gas, including water contamination, air pollution, toxic spills and emissions of gases causing climate change."

Another campaign group, 38 Degrees, warns that chemicals used in drilling muds can be just as toxic as those used in fracking fluids. "Communities in Australia are already suffering from symptoms associated with exposure to these chemicals, and a growing body of research points to devastating longer term impacts such as birth defects and cancers" they argue.

In fact, the state of New South Wales has banned all CBM activity within 2km of residential areas and rural businesses – a protection not afforded to people within the Forth Valley, some of whom will have boreholes drilled directly under their homes.

Advocates say the pioneering of new energy extraction methods in the UK will at least bring cheaper fuel prices and buy some time for the development of renewable energy.

But the Sunday Herald has cited an independent report which it says shows the calorific

value of the local gas, which is crucial in determining its price for consumers, is unlikely to be high enough for the National Grid.

"If these allegations are true, they cast a major cloud over Dart's much-delayed planning application and the economics of their coal-bed methane scheme," said Mary Church, campaigns co-ordinator at Friends of the Earth Scotland.

While European industry now pays about three times as much for its gas as its US counterpart, even an enthusiastic editorial in November's Economist can only see it adding "a few tenths of a percentage point" to the country's annual growth rate and is reluctant to make any forecasts for the industry beyond a decade.

'No benefit'

Asked for a view on fracking and similar practices, the Labour leader of Falkirk Council declined to comment, while SNP group leader Cllr Cecil Meiklejohn said it could be needed for the future when "more environmentally friendly methods of collection may have been developed".

However, she added:

"The carrot of lower fuel prices is just not going to happen and the energy will be exported with no benefit except to the collection company."

Dart Energy is now appealing for non-determination of the planning application as the council seeks further information about the proposal.

A public enquiry is due to take place in March at which local campaign group Falkirk Against Unconventional Gas (FAUG) will be calling upon expert witnesses to oppose the plans.

Jamie Mackenzie Hamilton, of the local group, said: "It's a real David and Goliath situation.

"We are in a very strong position right now, and if we can put forward the best possible case then there's a genuine likelihood we can win this..."

"A lot is at stake for us and the whole of the UK."

So far, just over £35,000 has been raised of the £50,000 needed and FAUG has welcomed the involvement of the national campaign group 38 Degrees, which has donated £20,000 to the cause.

SCOTLAND NEEDS AN INDEPENDENT CURRENCY

by Colin Fox

THERE IS a perfectly sensible debate to be had over what currency an independent Scotland should use but as usual the No side prefers to invent scare stories and deliver empty threats. George Osborne's visit to Edinburgh's Point Hotel on 13 February to tell Scotland that "leaving the UK means leaving the pound" is a case in point.

Many people were understandably angered by the Tory Chancellors latest foray North of the Border and asked how he had the gall to come up and dictate what currency Scotland could or could not use after independence? 'That will be our decision, and ours alone' was the widespread riposte.

And they had a point after all it is Scotland's pound as much as anyone's – and has been for 300 years – and there is nothing George Osborne or Ed Balls or Danny Alexander can do to stop us using it.

Unholy trinity

For its part, the SNP Government accused the unholy Unionist trinity – Osborne, Balls and Alexander – of "bluffing" and insisted the Sterling Zone remained its preferred option in the post-referendum negotiations that will decide the issue one way or the other. And there are, it's true, several advantages

for both Scotland and the rest of the UK in employing this option in the short term. It could provide a certain level of economic stability and certainty during the important 16 month period allocated to negotiating the transition to full Independence for Scotland.

But before we come to that it is worth reflecting on what prompted Osborne's U-turn after 18 months prevaricating over the UK Governments attitude to a Sterling Zone?

The Unionist side clearly felt this issue was a potential 'trump card' for them in the referendum debate and they had waited and waited until deploying it. So why now?

Why not continue to prevaricate on their response until say September when it could have been much more difficult for the Yes campaign to effectively rebut their charge?

Could it be that Better Together were rattled by the three consecutive opinion polls published in January each registering a 5 per cent rise in support for the Yes campaign?

Because Osborne's latest rare foray north of the Border was certainly a gamble. He knows fine well how unpopular such Tory visits are here. And he is also well aware that there is nothing he can do to stop us using the pound if we wish to. But his case was not economic



FREEDOM: independence is an opportunity to free ourselves from the neoliberal straitjacket imposed on us by The City of London

or monetary, it was political. His announcement was timed and designed to unsettle those 'don't knows' moving to Yes and to infer that a major plank of the Independence strategy was now closed off. It is also worth remembering that Osborne and his neoliberal Unionist colleagues in the Labour Party and Lib Dems oppose all four of the currency options outlined by the highly respected Fiscal Commission.

Their options – keeping the pounding as part of a Sterling Zone, keeping the pound and using it unofficially, joining the Euro or establishing our own currency – each carry pros and cons.

Political choice

The choice is therefore a political one as much as it is monetary or economic. The No campaign argues that the other three options are equally unpalatable and unworkable but are determined to extract a Plan-B from 'Team Salmond' as they describe the Yes campaign.

The SNP Government's preference remains for a Sterling Zone where Scotland shares the pound with the rest of the UK and has a seat on the Bank of England's Board. But increasingly this is seen by many Yes supporters as at best a transitional arrangement to provide a stable trading environ-

ment until a new Scots currency can be fully established.

The SSP accepts Scotland can continue to use the pound as long as we like, with or without the r-UK Governments approval. But we also recognise that using Sterling, officially or unofficially, means we have no control over interest rates, borrowing levels or the pounds international value.

So whilst a Sterling Zone may have short term attractions in providing an element of transitional stability for a newly Independent Scottish economy we need our own Scottish currency if we are to have full monetary and fiscal sovereignty in the long term.

But the debate over currency must not obscure the fact that the opportunity to free ourselves from the neoliberal straitjacket imposed on us by The City of London, Whitehall, Westminster and the Bank of England lies at the heart of this debate.

Control over our currency, as well as our monetary and fiscal policy is vital if we are to address the outrageous economic, financial and social inequalities in Scotland today.

That is why this debate on the currency is not some esoteric discussion. It is central to the economic, monetary, fiscal and above all political power we need to build our progressive new nation.

by John McAllion

Currency threat contempt for Scots

'BITTER Together' campaigners were triumphant as Britain's three-party establishment ruled out a currency union with a post-independent Scotland.

The co-ordinated announcement by Tory, Lib Dem and Labour spokespeople was intended to be a game changer that would cause undecided voters to flock into the No camp and scupper any prospect of a Yes majority in the referendum.

Unionist commentators hailed the dawn of these "pivotal days" in the argument over Scotland's future. They looked forward to the big "pocketbook questions" at the heart of the referendum vote now being addressed in the final run-in to 18 September.

They confidently predicted that Britain's rejection of a currency union had effectively holed the good ship Scottish independence below the waterline.

There was unanimity too across the British establishment's representatives in Scotland. Labour leader Johann Lamont joined hands with Coalition politicians, Treasury mandarins and the right wing CBI and Institute of Directors in trying to put the boot into the Yes campaign.

Tory leader Ruth Davidson cited the Labour-leaning Guardian columnists in support of their common unionist stance. Lib Dem leader, wee Willie Rennie, trailed along behind echoing whatever his bigger unionist pals had said.

It was all over bar the shouting. A decisive blow had been struck at the heart of the Yes campaign from which it would never recover.

Shifting intentions

Labour tweeters hailed a Yes campaign "debacle" which they claimed highlighted the "intellectual poverty and ineptitude" of the case for independence.

From their perspective and to paraphrase a great English romantic poet: "Bliss was it in this dawn to be alive, but to be British was very heaven!" Then the first post-currency union announcement opinion



**BACK DOOR
MINISTER:**
George Osborne
sneaks into his
recent lecture in
Edinburgh
through the
back door

poll was published. Voting intentions in Scotland had begun to shift but not in the direction unionists had expected.

Support for independence was up six points with support for the union down five points. The threat to sabotage the economy of an independent Scotland had backfired spectacularly. Far from being frightened into the No camp, undecided and angry voters were moving in the opposite direction.

No one should be surprised. Everything about the staging of this announcement seemed calculated to antagonise Scottish public opinion. George Gideon Oliver Osborne is a rich Tory toff and former member of the notorious, loutish and exclusive Bullingdon Club at Oxford.

He is also the author of a hated austerity programme that is being imposed upon Scotland by a government that Scotland did not elect. He is the last man on earth to be sent north to slap down rebellious Scots.

Similarly, the "impartial" advice against a currency union from the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury does not bear examination. Sir Nicholas Macpherson is an old Etonian, an Oxford graduate, a

Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath, an Order of Chivalry founded by George I in 1725, and a £176,000-a-year career civil servant.

A highlight of his 30 years as a Treasury mandarin was his evidence to the Iraq inquiry that public spending was "a bad thing" except when war is in prospect when the Treasury then gladly "starts signing the cheques". Like a stick of rock and like his Tory bosses, he has 'British establishment' running right through him.

Osborne's decision to sweep into and out of Edinburgh, deliver his lecture and then disappear south again without answering any serious questions or doing any interviews added insult to injury.

The offence to Scottish opinion from these pillars of the British establishment could hardly have been more calculated. Threatening what it regards as subject peoples is what that establishment has always done.

Neither of their personal careers was endangered by any potential electoral backlash in Scotland. Their utter contempt for Scottish opinion was unmistakable.

But why did Labour agree to play such a servile supporting role

to these right wing establishment figures at such a pivotal moment in the referendum campaign?

Did Gordon Brown not launch the 'United with Labour' No campaign with the express purpose of avoiding having to campaign by the side of the Tories?

Is there not supposed to be a separate Labour case for a Union through which the Tories are banished to the political fringe by a progressive, centre left British consensus? Why then was Balls playing Jeeves to Osborne's Bertie Wooster at such a key moment?

By siding with Tory establishment figures and going along with their threats against the people of Scotland, Balls and Miliband are sending out a clear signal that they are British first and an alternative to the Tories second.

Duopoly of power

They are also sending out a signal about the kind of British union they envisage as the alternative to Scottish independence. It will remain a union in which the first past the post electoral system underpins a Tory/Labour duopoly of power.

It will be a union in which a powerful Treasury and an independent Bank of England determine our economic future. It will be a union in which aristocratic privilege will be entrenched in both Houses of Parliament.

It will be a union in which British weapons of mass destruction underpin Britain's pretensions to be a global power. It will be a union where business interests will always trump workers' rights.

Ending such a union is a no-brainer for any forward-thinking socialist. Labour, of course, has long since ceased to be any kind of socialist party.

by *Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace
organiser*

Turning tides in the trade union ranks

THE TIDE is turning in favour of those of us campaigning as trade unionists for independence. Huge numbers of trade unionists have recently voted for Scottish independence after thorough, well-informed debates. At the special Scottish conference of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), the anti-independence camp won precisely ZERO votes, with not one single delegate willing to speak for No. Not one of their 82 Scottish branches voted for No during the debates last month.

Recent members' meetings of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) in Ayr and Aberdeen have given rapturous applause to their general secretary Bob Crow when he has declared his support for Scottish independence. A new poll of offshore workers suggests 7 out of 10 will vote Yes. And of course last year the Scottish Prison Officers Association became the first national union to officially support the Yes campaign, after a full debate.

Even those union leaders who unceremoniously imposed their union's support for the anti-independence camp with no – or entirely sham – consultation of Scottish members, are now desperately scrambling to distance themselves from the toxic, Tory-funded Better Together campaign.

Workers hold the key to Scotland's future – both on and beyond

18 September. We have the potential power to shape an independent Scotland's policies by forging a force for radical redistribution of power and wealth, for socialist change. And we have most to lose if workers continue to be ruled over and dictated to by the three factions of Thatcherism that dominate Westminster politics.

'General' George

On 13 February 'General' George Osborne sallied forth to Edinburgh like a colonial governor warning Scots if they dare vote for self-government he will take away the pounds in our pockets.

Workers could be forgiven for thinking Osborne and his millionaire razor gang had done that already, considering the savage pay cuts we've 'enjoyed' at the hands of Labour and Coalition Westminster regimes in recent decades!

This assault on the right of the Scottish people to share the assets we have helped create over generations is a timely reminder of just how much is at stake. A confirmation of the fear of British capitalist politicians at losing Scotland's vast resources. It is a reminder to working people that Tory, Lib Dem and Labour all piss in the same pot, in

defence of profit which depend on low pay, restricted workplace rights, and stoked-up divisions within the working class.

Switching from Tory to Labour at Westminster is as useful as switching energy suppliers so as to be ripped off and still left in fuel poverty under a different logo! The three Westminster factions of prove the need for independence with their carefully choreographed chorus of threats on the currency issue.

The day after their stunt workers employed by the Westminster government replied! The 1,000-strong Glasgow DWP branch of PCS voted by 2:1 for their national union to recommend a Yes vote in the Referendum. And the one-third minority were NOT calling for a No vote; they were personally for Yes, but wanted their national union to make no official recommendation on it.

Days later, 570 members of the giant 2,250-strong PCS branch at East Kilbride Taxes met. After thorough and democratic debate the vote was 60 per cent for PCS to recommend a Yes vote – as proposed by SSP member and YesPCS organiser John Davidson; 20 per cent to remain neutral; 20 per cent to call for a No vote. Other PCS branches in the Ministry of Justice, DWP, Driving Examiners and Scottish Government also voted for Yes after vigorous debates.

However, in several PCS branches the members openly and overwhelmingly declared they would be voting Yes, but then by (a sometimes slim) majority called on their national union to make no recommendation one way or the other. Two distinct types of arguments were advanced. Tiny handfuls of Labour hacks and anti-independence campaigners argued for PCS neutrality because they knew there is a better chance of snow surviving

Hell than of them winning members to a No vote; an entirely bogus stance. In contrast, many genuine members who actually intend to vote Yes have sincere fears that if PCS called for a Yes vote it could divide the union and shed members; genuine worries, but entirely misplaced.

PCS has a proud history of debating and deciding policies on a wide range of progressive policies, and has never seen a split in the union nor a mass exodus of members despite strongly held opposing views on issues such as Trident, abortion rights, wars, Palestine, etc.

In reality there is no such thing as 'neutrality' available to the trade unions on this vital issue as the government impose attacks on workers.

Civil servants face closure of HMRC Contact Centres, attacks on facility time for PCS reps to represent their members, and removal of the check-off system of union subs payments as a means of trying to cripple and crush the union, as government agencies wade through jobs and services like an army of occupation. The millionaire media pummel trade union members with lies, distortion and fantasy fears to cow them into voting No, into accepting Westminster's butchery of jobs, pay, services and workplace rights. To remain 'neutral' in this context would be to leave the Fear Factory unanswered.

Living wage

In the specific case of PCS, repeated annual conferences have called for far-reaching progressive policies such as a decent living wage for all over 16; public ownership of the energy giants to combat fuel poverty; a free, publicly owned and integrated transport system to challenge poverty and pollution; abolition of all the anti-union laws;



YOUR FUTURE: workers are key to a Yes victory in September

opposition to wars and nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

These are the policies pursued by the likes of the Scottish Socialist Party and the broad-based Trade Unionists for Independence.

Most of them are policies adopted by other trade unions' conferences with precisely zero chance of being implemented by any of the three Thatcherite factions dominating Westminster. So to pursue these clean, admirable principles, first in Scotland, then in neighbouring nations, the trade union movement should not pretend to be neutral, but forcefully campaign for independence as workers' organisations fighting to shape the type of Scotland we want after September meeting workers aspirations.

At their conference to decide their stance on the referendum, the PCS voted by 18,025 for 'no recommendation' to 5,775 for the union recommending a Yes vote – with a big, fat, round Zero for PCS supporting a No vote!

Regardless of the absurd headlines in The Herald, one thing is starkly clear: No is nowhere within PCS! Members see no sense in giving a vote of confidence to successive Westminster governments which have slaughtered their jobs, plundered their pay packets and now robbed their rights at work.

Zero votes for 'No'

The anti-independence parties can salvage no comfort whatsoever from the PCS decision to make no recommendation on Yes/No, because members attending the debates have shown a massive tide is running in favour of Yes by individual members. At the Cumbernauld Taxes branch meeting, out of 412 votes cast, No gained 3 – and one of those later said he did so by mistake! Not one single branch voted to endorse the No camp. At the Scottish conference of all 82 branches, not one single delegate was prepared to speak in favour of No – and the anti-independence campaign received precisely ZERO votes on the day.

As PCS activist and SSP member Gerry McMahon tweeted, "Better Together got a savage beating at PCS

This week, as Osborne and Balls cosy up to bully Scotland, it's time for traditional Scottish Labour voters to ask themselves -

Which side are you on?



Do you, along with the Scottish Socialist Party, the Radical Independence Campaign, The Jimmy Reid Foundation and Labour for Independence, want to see a fairer, progressive Scotland?

Or are you happy to find yourself on the same side as the Tories, UKIP, the BNP and The Daily Mail?

Please, think about it.

It's time to vote for a real change. For a fairer, more just, more equal society, vote

YES!



conference today and no delegate was prepared to give it First Aid!"

To their credit the SNP Government has declared continued adherence to 'no compulsory redundancies' and refused to implement the Westminster assault on facility time for union reps and the check-off system of collecting union membership fees.

The SNP White Paper has pledged Commissions on pay and workplace rights that kick the door open to the unions demanding an entirely different set of rights at work and pay levels under an independent Scotland. But the key thing confirmed by recent debates and votes at union meetings is that workers are increasingly taking on board the point consistently made by the SSP and Trade Unionists for Independence, and by the more recent growth of Labour for Independence: voting Yes is NOT a vote for Alex Salmond nor indefinite SNP governments. It is not a vote for the SNP implementation of a 1 per cent pay cap, nor is it a vote to cut Corporation Tax by

up to 3 per cent whilst promising very welcome social reforms.

It is a vote for democracy. For the actual right to choose and elect your preferred government. To open the way for the fight for living wages, scrapping anti union laws and public ownership not just of Royal Mail but of energy, railways and finance as demanded by the likes of the SSP and TUFI. In other words, voting Yes is a means to very desirable ends: it opens the path to vast improvements in the rights and living standards of the working class of Scotland. The Yes supporters within the Society of Radiographers have captured the choices facing workers perfectly in their graphic.

As Shakespeare wrote, "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood leads on to fortune." And in the affairs of women, of course! The tide is turning in the trade union ranks towards the gains to be made and organised for by winning a Yes vote in September. That's why STUC general secretary Grahame Smith recently stated that

union members find the Yes campaign's vision more attractive than that of Better Together – a position that would have been unthinkable ten or twenty years ago, given the umbilical link between Labour and the unions. That's why trade union leaders like those of the GMB are now desperately seeking distance from the Tory-funded but Labour-fronted Better Together campaign.

That's why when union branches have approached Better Together for a speaker to debate the issues at meetings they are usually offered people from the Coop Party, left Labour MSP Neil Findlay, or the likes of Richard Leonard, GMB Scottish political officer (and member of the so-called Red Paper Collective, which makes grandiose claims to put class before nationality) who then insist they are no part of Better Together! That's also why the Scottish UNISON leadership have firmly resisted offers of UK UNISON funds from fake-left general secretary Dave Prentis to join the Better Together cabal. And it's the fundamental reason the giant UNITE union has pointedly refused to join Better Together.

Push forward

Every trade unionist who supports independence should redouble their efforts to push this tide forward. The Yes Scotland campaign should go beyond the limits of the SNP White Paper and forcefully broadcast – as a bare minimum – the opportunity to repeal the anti-union laws; ensure the best workplace rights in Europe; achieve a living minimum wage for all over 16; and win democratic public ownership of Royal Mail, transport, energy and banking in order to create well-paid and secure jobs for all.

We need to fight for the hearts and minds of the 630,000 Scottish trade unionists – and those workers too terrified by anti-union laws and anti-union employers to become members – with a vision of the "fortune" available to the working class, provided we organise for a Yes vote but also for radical changes in favour of the millions rather than the millionaires.

JOHN FINNIE MSP BLACKLISTING TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

In the first of a new regular Voice column, independent MSP for Highlands and Islands **John Finnie** reports from Holyrood

PARLIAMENTS make laws and your parliament has been very busy making laws. The question, as ever, are they good laws? The much awaited Procurement Bill, vaunted as a great opportunity to provide opportunities to local businesses, was first up and time will tell if it's effective.

What was very pleasing was the direct way that the Minister promoting the Bill, Nicola Sturgeon, tackled the big companies head-on about black-listing:

"The practice of blacklisting, failure to comply with obligations on tax and other acts of professional misconduct could in the future result in a company being judged to be unsuitable to bid, and rightly so."

Blacklisting is the work of the bully and whilst I welcome the assurances about the robust application of the Bill I stand shoulder to shoulder with those asking for an independent inquiry into the practice.

Only last week I met a tradesman who, although he's never appeared on any known list, believes his failure to secure continued work in the North Sea followed his raising health and safety concerns.

Better support

Last week the Scottish Parliament passed the Children and Young People's Bill.

I welcomed the Bill's passage as it will mean better support for children and families in need, an increase in the number of hours of pre-school childcare to 600 and it increased the age children leave local authority care to 21.

The Bill drew strong opposition about the "named-person service" i.e. a point of contact to co-ordinate services if needed. This proposal reflected the successful scheme, launched by Highland Council in 2010, which emerged from parent's wanting a clear point of contact for services to support their child's development and well-being which enjoys universal support.

Enter the fray, the Daily Mail who described the provisions as "Alex Salmond's political plan for every Scots child" and the various religious groups, keen to go fighting another hopeless cause again after losing their equal marriage war.

'Communism'

The Minister for Children and Young People made clear to MSPs that the proposals are not about "treating every child with the same procedures with which we treat vulnerable children...recommending that a social worker be appointed for every child...giving named persons the authority to enter every house...establishing a national database".

My favourite communication on the Bill was from a man from Nairn who wished me to vote against the "named-person" provisions "as a way of halting the advance of communism". Do not underestimate the 'red menace' facing Nairn!

Law-making is a lengthy process with valuable input from the public and interested lobby groups and it was significant that the Children's Charities supported the named person provisions, seeing it for what it was, encouraging co-ordinated work across the public sector.

It was at the Women's Employment Summit in 2012 that Deputy First Minister

Nicola Sturgeon referred to childcare as "infrastructure", making a direct comparison between childcare and transport systems. Without accessible and adequate transport, people would not be able to get to work.

Challenges

The challenges of childcare provision, the costs, the available hours are well known and what I feel we need to address with some purpose is the gender stereotyping which assumes that child care is the mother's role.

I am part of the Equal Opportunities Committee which is keen to hear about the experiences of single fathers and fathers with shared custody of children to identify the key challenges they face in day-to-day life and the quality of support currently available to them.

Finally, today's Bill, the Public Bodies (Joint Working) Bill - integrated health and social care to you and me.

Again, some important issues about employment. Again, the Highlands pioneered this approach and, thus far at least, it's working well. The Christie Commission report stated that "...effective services must be designed with and for people and communities - not

developed 'top-down' for administrative convenience".

I have long opposed privatisation of care at home and Care Homes and believe that this leads to an inevitable race to the bottom on price with quality of care suffering.

The Labour Party had an amendment, which they will no doubt back up with a press release, bemoaning the fact that there was no support for their efforts to improve home care workers' rights.

Gesture politics

Anyone reading their spokespersons speech would have some sympathy for that view whilst anyone reading their actual amendment, minus a financial statement, would recognise gesture politics, not least as the Lisbon Treaty stops such an approach being adopted.

I don't like gestures. Gestures don't protect terms and conditions, health and safety and quality of care, neither does the profit motive. Profit from the care of the vulnerable is an anathema to me just as profit from prisons is.

There's a workers' co-operative provides care in part of the Highlands and I don't receive complaints about terms and conditions or quality of care about it. Perhaps a lesson there?

Join the SSP here

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Name.....

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by Paolo Caserta

OVER THE last few years countless meetings organised by the Yes Scotland campaign across the country have seen thousands of people attending, each and every one of them armed with their own set of questions.

The Scottish Socialist Party has played a major part in the campaign since its launch in 2012, and continues to do so putting forward a unique vision of an independent socialist Scotland, a modern democratic republic that and offers realistic and pragmatic solutions to issues such as fuel poverty, employment laws or affordable housing. One of such meetings was in Edinburgh, when more than 140 people were packed in the auditorium of the Craigroyston Community School at which speakers, including Colin Fox on behalf of the SSP, all made the case for a Yes vote in the referendum as well as fielding questions from undecided voters in the audience.

Colin introduced his speech by illustrating the contest of the debate on independence, saying a yes vote will be "a vote against a neoliberal, warmongering agenda that is been foisted on Scotland for decades by unrepresentative Westminster governments", emphasising the fact that the working class majority of Scotland will be economically, socially



Another successful Yes meeting in Edinburgh

YES! 140 people packed into the meeting at Craigroyston Community School

and politically better off under independence. "It stands to reason that if all the wealth created here and all the taxes paid by the people stayed here, instead of being siphoned off to the UK Treasury in London, Scotland will be better off" he stated, our tax revenues alone last year were £50billion, the Scottish Parliament budget was £33billion, leaving a staggering £17billion lost in the process. Independence will make Scotland socially better off since it will give us the power to address the rampant inequality that plague our nation: "It's an outrage that in one of the richest country in the world in the 21st century one in five children grow up in poverty, that one in three household in Scotland suffers the indignity of fuel poverty having to

choose between eating or heating". And an independent Scotland will be politically better off as "we will make our own decisions and avoid policies like the Bedroom Tax, the anti-union laws, the privatisation of our hospitals, schools, prisons and other public services. There will be no more young Scots would be sent to die in wars for British Imperialism or occupy countries that don't want us to be there".

A number of questions followed the speaker's intervention, queries about the constitutional debate, European Union, racism and economic policies, a reminder of the huge public interest on the issue of independence and the need for the SSP to emphasise the plurality of opinions inside Yes Scotland.

The end of ATOS assessments?

by Sandra Webster

ITS BEEN a bad week for the French software giant ATOS. One of their money making schemes has been carrying out the work capability assessment tests for the ConDems.

There has been a huge public outcry about the fairness and legitimacy of ATOS assessments. This has been helped by the unrelenting energy of the many "Against ATOS" groups that have sprung up all over the UK. These groups demonstrate in solidarity outside places where the capability tests take place.

The 19th of February saw a massive day of action when thou-

sands took to the streets for a show of mass solidarity. A grand total of 144 demonstrations all across the UK. The majority of those demonstrating were people with disabilities and long term conditions and their carers along with ordinary people who find the need for such assessments reprehensible.

It was with some amusement that we read in the paper three days later that ATOS were in talks to get out of their government contract early.

The reason they quoted were death threats against staff. ATOS claim over 163 threats were made online or in person. Individual threats of course cannot be con-

doned. Having attended an ATOS assessment, I find it difficult to see a situation where someone might find the strength and energy to become angry. Protestors carry 'ATOS KILLS' posters and we have all heard the stories of people found fit for work who have died shortly after being found fit for work

The DWP have refused to answer Freedom of Information requests on how many people have actually died as they state it will be too vexatious to themselves. The ConDems were not happy with the work of ATOS and were planning for other companies such as Capita and SERCO among others to take over.

THE CASE FOR AN INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST SCOTLAND



by Colin Fox

To order 'The Case For An Independent Socialist Scotland' by Colin Fox, send £5 to: SSP, Suite 370, 4th Floor, Central Chambers, 93 Hope St, Glasgow G2 6LD. Cheques: 'Scottish Socialist Party'.

To order 'End Fuel Poverty And Power Company Profiteering' by Colin Fox, send £4.

Or get both pamphlets for only £8 (inc. p+p)

END FUEL POVERTY AND POWER COMPANY PROFITEERING



by Colin Fox

by Natasha Hickman,
Cuba Solidarity Campaign

US blockade of Cuba and the Miami Five

THE UNITED States government is not unaccustomed to being out on a limb when it comes to its relations with Cuba. For the last 22 years it has consistently ignored the rest of the world when they overwhelmingly voted against an inhumane 52 year-old policy of blockade.

But even the US, a country notoriously thick-skinned and belligerent when it comes to listening to international opinion on its foreign policy, would be ill-advised to ignore the mounting pressure for change. Internationally and internally, their failed policy is being questioned – and significantly in recent weeks from the most unlikely places.

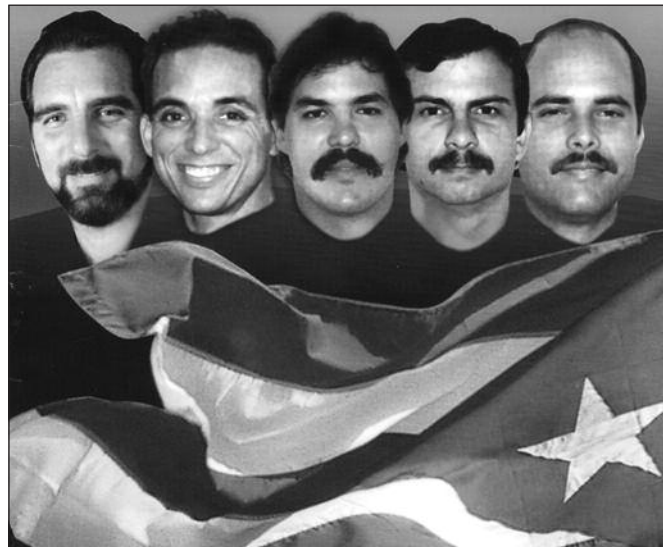
This month a nationwide poll by the Atlantic Council in the US showed that more US citizens than ever before now favour normalising relations and engagement with Cuba. What is most notable is that the poll's findings remain the same among sample groups of Republicans and Cuban Americans, traditionally seen as being 'hard line pro-Blockade'.

Damage

And surely the irony is not lost in Congress when it is US politicians who are increasingly lamenting the damage that the blockade is causing the US economy and its people who are unable to benefit from Cuban trade or medical innovations.

In much of the US media the tone is beginning to change too. In an op-ed piece in the Miami Herald, entitled "Time for a new Policy on Cuba." US Senators Patrick Leahy and Jeff Flake, noted that, "a majority of Americans, including Cuban-Americans, want to change course," and "so do we."

Last week a Los Angeles Times editorial – "Cross Cuba Off the Black List" – called for Cuba to be taken off the state sponsor of terror list. The Financial Times called for the same in its recent editorial on 22 February it ran under the



headline: "Embargo is embarrassing, anachronistic – and has failed." The world's media by no means has had a change of heart on Cuba, it still peddles misinformation from the state department and right wing exile groups, but its line on US policy is moving from ridiculous Cold War propaganda to a reasoned and sensible line.

Even the US's closest allies are making this point. At the Organisation of American States (OAS) meeting last year, Colombia's President Santos, President Obama's best friend in Latin America sided with other member countries to give Obama the ultimatum that unless Cuba is included in the 2015 OAS regional meeting, it will not go ahead.

Here the UK itself has already signed a bilateral cooperation agreement with the island and the European Union is currently seeking a new approach which would end its 'Common Position' on relations with Cuba which has been a de facto 'mini blockade' following on the coat tails of US policy for almost 20 years.

Everything is in place for a change in US-Cuba relations. Cuba has repeatedly announced

that it is happy to sit down and have open discussions with the US. In November, even Obama said that old policies "don't make sense." But does he have the courage to break the deadlock when eleven previous US Presidents have failed?

If he does, the first question he needs to answer is what he plans to do about the Miami Five? These five Cuban men are integral to the future of US-Cuba. Their story symbolises the history and relations between the two countries. And until they are all freed from US jails and back in Cuba, relations between the two countries can never fully heal.

For those unfamiliar with the case, the Miami Five infiltrated terrorist groups based in Florida during the 1990s. These groups were responsible for numerous US-based attacks and bombings against Cuba, most notoriously a string of hotel bombings which injured many and killed an Italian tourist, and the terrible 1976 bombing of a Cubana airline which killed all 73 passengers.

Although all the information they collected about these groups was passed by the Cuban government

to US authorities, the five were arrested and charged with espionage in 1998. Their subsequent trial, conditions of imprisonment, appeals and denial of visitation rights for some family members have been condemned across the world by parliamentarians, Nobel prize winners, the UN Committee on Arbitrary Detentions and Amnesty International.

The International Commission of Inquiry into the case of the Five on 7-8 March will investigate these issues in detail – bringing together more than 20 international commissioners, witnesses and legal experts, including Rene Gonzalez, the first of the Five to be released.

Victims

It will hear from victims of terrorism, including the father of the tourist killed in a hotel bombing and the daughter of a victim of the Cubana airline bomb. Special guests include Alice Walker, the Pulitzer prize winning US author of *The Color Purple*, Ricardo Alarcon, former Cuban foreign Secretary, and Ramsey Clarke, former US Attorney general.

When the Commission publishes its findings it hopes that the case of the Miami Five is looked at again and increase the pressure on President Obama will do the right thing and grant a pardon to these men. Then, and only then, might we see the beginning of the end of the blockade.

• *Find out more about the Commission and the Voices for the Five Concert at the Barbican on Friday 7 March, featuring Eliades Ochoa and Omara Portuondo, stars of the Buena Vista Social Club, at <http://voicesforthe5.com>*

by Bill Bonnar

UKRAINE IN CRISIS

THE POLITICAL crisis in Ukraine reached a dramatic climax when President Yanukovych was ousted by a combination of mass pressure in the streets and a revolt within his own party.

The spectacle of security forces killing scores of protesters made his position untenable and resulted in a hastily assembled coalition desperately pushing through a raft of reforms including a commitment to early elections, a lifting of the state of emergency and the release of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. The origins of this crisis, like elsewhere in the region, lie in the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early nineties. Ukraine became an independent state, in part through the efforts of an independence movement, but mostly by default.

Mass poverty

The harsh reality of life in post-Soviet Ukraine has been abysmal. The economy plunged into free fall with resulting mass poverty and unemployment. It has never recovered and exists at a level substantially below that of Soviet times.

The collapse of social provision quickly followed with a massive reduction in education, health care, pensions and housing. Social problems such as homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse and destitution have reached levels unheard of in Soviet times. Like in Russia, political power passed into the hands of a wealthy, corrupt and often criminal oligarchy who still control the country today while tensions escalated between the Ukrainian and Russian populations and the different regions of Ukraine.

In other words post-Soviet Ukraine has been a disaster story by just about every definition of the word disaster one can think of. The mass demonstrations, which had been escalating for months reaching a crescendo of violence in Independence Square, brought together a broad based and disparate coalition of forces in response to the shambles that capitalist Ukraine has become. Many were democrats

DEATHS: in a commemorative procession in Kiev, women carry photos of protesters killed while clashing with police recently



yearning for genuine democracy to be established and wanting a break with the succession of governments which have come to power through a combination of corruption and rigged ballots. Others were protesting against a myriad of social and economic problems. Some were openly fascist believing that what Ukraine needs is a state based on Ukrainian nationalism, a toxic response in a country where significant sections of the population are not Ukrainians. Overriding all these issues is whether Ukraine should become part of the European Union or develop closer ties with Russia.

The EU has been actively encouraging Ukraine to become a member the irony of which will not be lost on the people of Scotland.

While the European Commission President, Jose Manuel Barroso, has categorically ruled out

Scotland being admitted to the EU he has rolled out the welcome mat for Ukraine. Clearly Scotland does not match the criteria for membership which now appears that you have to be a state of economic and political chaos to apply. Countering this is the proposal that Ukraine re-establishes its recent historical relationship with Russia; a move supported by Ukraine's large Russian speaking minority and some important regions such as Crimea.

What will happen next? The initial efforts are all about ending the immediate political crisis, halting the mass protests, forming some kind of viable government of national unity, and holding new elections. The problem is that any new government will face huge problems. How to deal with the appalling and seemingly never ending social and economic crisis. Historians will

argue over the success or failure of Soviet Ukraine but there can be no argument over the total failure that has been capitalist Ukraine.

Divided country

How to hold together a disparate country severely divided along national and regional lines. Whether Russia or the EU? Many of the demonstrators in Independence Square see the EU as some kind of utopia but it is a view not shared in large parts of the country. As always the question has to be asked; where is the socialist left in all this?

It exists largely around a centre-left bloc based on an alliance of the remnants of the old Ukrainian Communist Party and left social democrats. Their vote tends to fluctuate widely depending on the particular circumstances at the time and is overwhelmingly based in Russian speaking areas.

Despite this limitation it is obvious that Ukraine is crying out for a legitimate movement of the left which can develop a critical analysis of Soviet Ukraine, expose the total bankruptcy of capitalism and put together a programme of social, economic and political reforms which serve the interests of the Ukrainian people rather than the assortment of corrupt oligarchs, western capitalists and Russian strategic interests which have done so much damage to the country.

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Voice's key role in winning Yes vote and shaping Scotland's future

by Ken Ferguson

THE VOICE, which was first published in 1996, is the only socialist paper edited, published and printed in Scotland, and proudly campaigns under the twin banners of independence and socialism.

We offer a unique mix of news and comment which both reports and supports those struggling for democracy, workers rights and social justice in Scotland and across the planet, while also offering space to discuss the alternative to the neoliberal dominance of today.

However, as the battle for Scotland's future heats up, the role of the Voice takes on a heightened importance and reflecting that fact, from our next issue on 14 March, we will be expanding our size from 12 to 16 pages, improving our ability to cover events and support those in struggle. And still at the bargain price of £1!

Our extra pages will also allow us to expand the numbers of writ-

ers for the paper and this will become clear in the issues ahead.

Alongside our traditional role as a paper, the Voice is also playing its part in the rising tempo of debate on the need for democratic and social change by hosting a series of forums looking at key topics facing the progressive left.

Our first forum in Edinburgh in December was packed and brought together a range of speakers from differing viewpoints including Greens, the peace movement, left nationalists and SSP to respond to the Scottish Government's independence White Paper.

We are now hosting our second forum, again in Edinburgh, on 8 March to look at the key task of mobilising the potentially thousands of voters particularly in Scotland's working class communities who, polls indicate, back independence.

The forum – 'Yes beyond Salmond: why voting Yes doesn't make you a nationalist' – will discuss not just the case for a Yes



The poster for the Scottish Socialist Voice Forum features a collage of six speakers' portraits: Jim Sillars, Maggie Chapman, Allan Grogan, Colin Fox, Jonathon Shafi, and Jean Urquhart. The text on the poster reads: 'Scottish Socialist Voice', 'The Forum is jointly sponsored by Edinburgh University Scottish Socialist Party Students Society', 'YES BEYOND SALMOND', 'WHY SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE DOESN'T MAKE YOU A NATIONALIST', and 'SAT 8 MARCH, 10am-2pm, The Martin Hall, New College, Edinburgh University'.

vote but the policies needed to convince voters that doing so will make a real difference to their lives.

Given that support for Scottish independence is strongest among the working class majority of voters, the task of mapping out a future beyond a Yes vote which aims to shift wealth and power in favour of that majority is central to the outcome in September.

It is essential that the debate moves beyond the stale Cameron

vs Salmond knock about and offers a realistic vision of the alternative on jobs, wages, workers rights, the environment and peace which can be opened up by a Yes vote.

Places at the forum are limited so we urge Voice readers to apply for tickets and join this key debate.

• Get free forum tickets at scottishsocialistparty.org or email: ssp.colin.fox@live.co.uk

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY MOTION SUPPORTS VOICE FORUM

Independent Highlands and Islands MSP **Jean Urquhart** has lodged a motion in the Scottish Parliament supporting the Voice Forum

Scottish Socialist Voice Forum, 8 March 2014

"THAT THE Parliament notes that the Scottish Socialist Voice will host a forum at New College in Edinburgh on 8 March 2014 entitled, Yes Beyond Salmond: Why Supporting Independence Doesn't Make You a Nationalist; understands that this will be its second such

forum, the first of which examined the white paper on independence; welcomes what it sees as the development of events that articulate views on independence outwith those of the bigger political parties; considers that the panel, which includes representatives from Labour for Independence, the Scottish Green Party, the Scottish Socialist Party, the Radical Independence movement and the former Labour and SNP MP, Jim Sillars, demonstrate the broad spectrum of progressive opinion in favour of independence; believes that it is important that the electorate does not base its

decision at the referendum on their views of any individual, including the First Minister and the Prime Minister, but on the visions of the future laid out by both campaigns; considers that a positive, progressive vision of Scotland is more compelling than the neoliberal and isolationist world view of the UK establishment, particularly for people it sees as having been disproportionately affected by the UK government's welfare reforms, and encourages people who feel alienated or disengaged from the status quo to engage with the referendum debate."