

£50k

SSP indy appeal:
help us raise £50k
to finance campaign
• see page 2

Scottish Labour conference: we
were promised a 'game changer'
but all we got was a damp squib
• see page 5

£1 • issue 435 • 28th March – 10th April 2014
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Scottish Socialist Voice



MUPPETS TOGETHER

**Kermit has come out against Scottish independence...
but a vote for the Better Together muppets will not:**

- **DELIVER A LIVING WAGE**
- **SCRAP ANTI-TRADE UNION LAWS**
- **DUMP TRIDENT NUCLEAR WEAPONS**
- **END THE WAR ON BENEFITS**
- **STOP YOUNG SCOTS DYING IN ILLEGAL WARS**

ONLY A YES VOTE CAN OPEN THE WAY TO REAL CHANGE



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£50k

£50k
needed to
fund the
socialist
campaign

SSP Yes campaign fund's £50k target

by Jim McVicar, SSP national treasurer

THIS SEPTEMBER'S independence referendum represents the most important election in Scotland's history. For the first time in generations, the votes of working class men and women in Scotland will make a real difference in how Scotland is governed.

Your vote will mean something and we won't just be voting fodder to elect an other London-based government that are incapable of protecting the lives and living standards of ordinary working class Scots from the attacks of big business and their political representatives on how we live.

The Scottish Socialist Party has grasped the nettle and as a party are committed to the fight for a Yes vote and Scottish independence. We have taken delivery of our new national leaflet and expanded the Scottish Socialist Voice to 16 pages, along with publishing two new pamphlets on Scottish independence and fuel poverty – all very positive efforts in trying to get our message across to the thousands of ordinary Scots who will determine the outcome of the referendum.

The SSP has a spending target of £50,000 for the referendum campaign, a figure that has been determined by the electoral commission. In reality, what that means is that we have to raise £50,000 to finance our campaign.

Every penny raised will be spent on campaigning and campaign material like I have described above and advancing our socialists ideas throughout the length and breadth of Scotland.

The SSP unlike the majority of parties involved in the referendum don't have any rich backers or friends in the city of London to bankroll the campaign.

Every penny and every pound the Scottish Socialist Party spends in this campaign will come through the fund raising of party members and the financial support of our members supporters and friends.

£50,000 is a massive sum of money for the SSP to raise but when you think seriously of what is at stake in the referendum, I am sure, as a party, the SSP can and will raise the money.

We recognise that a Yes vote will be a massive democratic leap forward for the people of Scotland, and that is why we have played a distinctive role in Yes Scotland and RIC campaigns, working with both these broader movements for independence.

The SSP is spreading our message to every corner of Scotland through street work, leaflets and public meetings, like our very successful public meeting in

Ayr with over 200 people turning up to

hear Jim Sillars and SSP co-spokesperson Colin Fox on the case for an independent socialist Scotland.

Already we have had some great donations – from our members and friends, from the 50 pences saved up in a jar by one member, from an ex-coal miner on the 30th anniversary of beginning of the great miners' strike, from local government workers – all the donations are helpful and appreciated, and have helped get the appeal off to a great start.

I am appealing to you directly as a Voice reader, party member, supporter or friend, to play your part, please – make a donation to the appeal today.



PHOTO:
Craig Maclean

£40k

£30k

£20k

£15k

£10k

£5k

HOW TO DONATE

- At your local SSP branch
- Send a cheque to 'SSP Independence Appeal Fund' and return to Jim McVicar, SSP National Treasurer, Suite 307, 93 Hope St, Glasgow G2 6LD
- Text 07810205747 with your pledge amount and email address if you have one
- Bank transfer: SSP Appeal Fund Account, Co-operative Bank, Sort Code 08-92-99 / Account No.

65094637 – if you pay by bank transfer, please text or email Jim McVicar (see below) with the details so we know where the donation has come from.

If you want to help with the appeal fund, or if you need any more details, contact Jim McVicar on 07810205747 or email: jimmcvicar.scottishsocialistparty@hotmail.com

PHONEY CLASS WAR TALK WON'T HIDE LABOUR'S BETTER TOGETHER REALITY

by Ken Ferguson

FROM LABOUR'S

ambition for an "irreversible shift of wealth" to working people 40 years ago, to the Blair/Brown love in with the rich is quite a leap.

The recent death of Tony Benn recalled that earlier period when the rich really did – briefly – fear for their world of wealth and power. However it also threw a harsh spotlight on the reality of today's Labour Party. Blair and Brown, in power with big majorities at Westminster, used that power to harness Labour to the world of casino capitalism unleashed by Thatcher, which shifted vast wealth and power into the grubby hands of the super rich.

At the same time, they took trade union money, left Thatcher's anti-union laws intact and paraded in their dinner suits at City banquets, praising the rich.

Insipid leadership

When it all collapsed in 2007, they rediscovered public ownership in order to rescue the self same speculators from the financial collapse they inflicted on us all ensuring that kept their own cash intact.

Now, under the insipid leadership of "Red" Ed Miliband, they scramble to look radical while backing essentially the same harsh agenda of cuts and economic repression for the majority of their Better Together ConDem pals.

This is a difficult trick to pull off in a rightward moving England but faced, as in Scotland with a left of centre government, it rapidly unravels. This reality was



gruesomely showcased at the "Scottish" Labour conference on the banks of the Tay in Perth which was dominated by grubby party fixes producing a timid "devo nano" offer and a sea of anti-Salmond bile.

So lack lustre was aspiring-PM Miliband's speech that the largely unionist Scottish press barely noticed it.

The so called Red Paper portraying Labour as about to wage war on the rich as it is in reality a shopping list which flies in the face of the reality of leader Johann Lamont's belief that Scotland is a "something for nothing" society.

Picking up The Herald the day after its launch I was struck by the interpretation of Magnus Gardham that this represents a leftward move by Labour which suggests that a glittering career in creative fiction lies in front of him.

Of Ms Lamont's anti-Yes tirade the best that can be said is it pleased the delegates. Nobody much else was listening. Labour, already tainted by the pro war, rich loving Blair/Brown years are so out of touch that they still believe the deeply discredited grumpy Brown is a super star. However the polls tell another

tale with the gap between Yes and No steadily narrowing and some 34 per cent of Labour voters backing independence.

Labour, once the dominant voice of progressive Scotland, now finds itself opposing an optimistic coalition fighting for a Yes vote with vision of a socially just and sustainable Scotland which would once have been endorsed by them.

Austerity

Instead they are in bed with the detested Tories and their flexible Lib Dem friends who impose cuts, wage freezes and austerity while they pump out – all three – a daily diet of demeaning anti-Scottish scares.

As the UK polls point to a Labour defeat at Westminster and the reality of their cosyng up to the Tories turns off Labour voters in growing numbers this key constituency is there to be won for Yes. Given the self inflicted damage that their BT alliance is inflicting on them it may just be that only a fresh start in an independent Scotland can make Labour a serious contender for Scottish voter's trust.

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by John McAllion

IF POLITICIANS are judged not just by their actions or by what they say, but also by the quality of their enemies, then on all three of those criteria Tony Benn was a very successful politician.

He had the kind of enemies that any socialist could be proud of. He was loathed by Labour careerists and right wingers. Harold Wilson said that he had "immatured with age". Roy (Lord) Hattersley labelled him as "totally irresponsible" and "the man most responsible for keeping Labour out of office" between 1979 and 1997. New Labour's Alan Johnson accused him of "doctrinaire impossibleism". To SDP defector Lord McNally he was "a treacherous bastard".

To his enemies on the establishment right he was a class traitor who had renounced a hereditary peerage to take up the political cudgel on behalf of the working class.

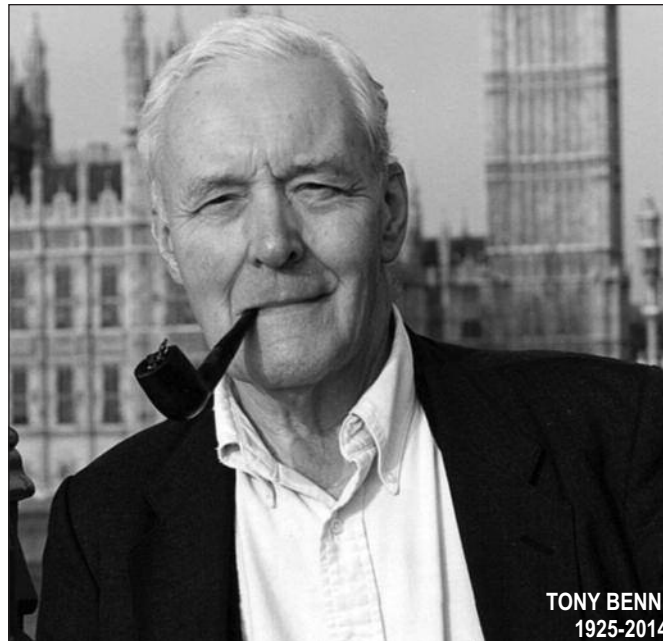
One Tory MP dismissed him as a "hard left bruise and Marxist nutter". Once dubbed by the Tory press as the "most dangerous man in Britain", he was never forgiven for his republican disrespect to the Queen when, as Postmaster General, he tried to persuade her to have her head removed from British stamps.

Anti-apartheid

However, the left both inside and outside of the Labour Party saw Tony Benn very differently.

He consistently championed left causes from the anti-apartheid movement through CND to the Stop the War coalition. He marched with the two Jimmies, Reid and Airlie, in Glasgow to support the Upper Clydeside ship workers. He was regularly the star speaker at the Durham Miners' Gala and, unlike the leadership of his party, he stood in solidarity with the NUM throughout and beyond the 1984-85 miners' strike.

BENN HAD THE 'KIND OF ENEMIES ANY SOCIALIST COULD BE PROUD OF'



TONY BENN:
1925-2014

He was also the main inspiration for the Labour left throughout the 18 years of parliamentary wilderness during which their party lost four elections to the Tories. As the Labour leadership moved remorselessly to the right in search of government office, he argued for an alternative economic strategy that would have brought about "a fundamental and irreversible shift of the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families".

He articulated the case for socialism at a time when the Parliamentary Labour Party was in full retreat from the old-time socialist religion of Keir Hardie, George Lansbury and Jimmy Maxton.

In the wake of the 1979 defeat to Thatcher, Tony Benn led Labour's grass-roots insurgency around the demands for parliamentary reselection and the in-

volvement of the trade unions and party activists in the election of the party leader. This culminated in the titanic struggle with Dennis Healy for deputy leader of the party in 1981 in which his right-wing opponent scraped home with a majority of less than 1 per cent. An ageing Michael Foot was then Labour leader and would stand down within of two years of the contest.

Had Benn won, the history of the Labour Party and of Britain might have taken a very different trajectory from the right wing course that Kinnock initiated and Blair completed.

Even his enemies concede that Tony Benn was a gifted and inspirational speaker. He was one of the few MPs who always spoke to a packed House of Commons. Respect for his ability as an orator crossed party lines and reached out to people who did not think of themselves as political. As he aged and as

the threat he posed to the establishment receded he became "a national treasure", everyone's favourite political uncle.

His diaries which chronicle 50 years of his take on British politics are not only his political testament but a rich source of material for historians into the future. As someone who is a long-time admirer and who had the privilege of working with him in the Campaign Group of Socialist Labour MPs, I hesitate to offer any criticism of such a giant of the British Left.

However, Tony Benn was first and always a House of Commons man. He fought the establishment to retain his membership of the House of Commons. His grandfathers and father had all been MPs. His earliest boyhood memories revolved around early meetings with the like of Lloyd George and Ramsay MacDonald.

Times changed

He was given a Big Ben birthday cake on his 80th birthday. He cried when his son Hilary became a New Labour minister. He was one of the few MPs to be granted life membership of the House of Commons library on his retirement. After Thatcher, he is only the second MP whose corpse will rest in the Chapel of the House of Commons on the eve of his funeral.

Tony Benn was of his time and could not see past the House of Commons. He never understood that times have changed and that socialist progress now depends upon our generation doing precisely that.

by Colin Fox

THIS WAS the week Labour unveiled its long awaited Devolution Commission report outlining the powers it intends to bestow upon the Scottish Parliament in the event of a No vote.

To gasps of incredulity, a nation could be heard to sigh in disbelief 'Is that it?' We were promised a 'game changer' and got a non-event. Johann Lamont's proposals, the result of 18 months' deliberation by the Labour Party in Scotland turned out to be less than the cross party [Labour, Tory and Lib Dem] Calman Commission suggested back in 2012.

Following widespread speculation that Labour was about to unveil powers over income tax revenues and welfare strategy (and rumours they would transfer the running of the Crown Estates in Scotland) all we got was the chance to raise the top rate of tax by 15p and manage a couple of benefits. This was the proverbial 'damp squib', a desperate anti-climax not least for the hundreds of thousands of devo max supporters who we are told make up the bulk of the don't-knows in the polls.

Dilemma

To be fair Labour faced a real dilemma over whether to promise extensive additional powers to Holyrood or not. On the one hand many MSPs argued that substantial extra powers were necessary to persuade devo max supporters to stay with the Union. But they realised this would never get through the Westminster Parliament. On the other hand Labour MPs demanded they promise next to nothing in terms of extra powers and avoid the aforementioned Westminster defeat altogether.

They have clearly opted for the latter and in doing so have alienated the very devo max supporters they need to win the referendum.

The London controlled Labour Party clearly believe they can win the referendum without this key constituency. They may just have made their biggest blunder so far.

Is that it...? Labour's devo max damp squib



NON-EVENT: far from being the game-changer we were promised, Labour's Scottish conference was the ultimate anti-climax

So where does this leave devo max? Answer D.E.A.D. in the water. Those who wanted Holyrood to have the power to raise its own revenues and protect Scots from the worst effects of alien Westminster legislation – such as the hated Bedroom Tax, the hounding of people with disabilities, scapegoating claimants and immigrants for crises caused by bankers in the City of London, illegal wars, Trident, the privatisation of essential public services and further tax breaks for the rich – have been left high and dry.

Expect to see further narrowing in the opinion polls over the next few weeks as a consequence. Every opinion poll so far in 2014 has shown support for 'Yes' growing. I anticipate the polls drawing even closer as Labour's devo max damp squib bombs with those people – the majority we were told at the outset of this referendum campaign – who preferred extra powers for Holyrood rather than the status quo or Independence. They now realise the only way to get those

extra powers is by voting Yes on 18 September.

The result of the referendum in September may well be very close indeed as there are other factors which come into play. First if UKIP emerges as the largest party down south in June's elections to the European Parliament – whilst failing to win a single seat up here – the view that political views are poles apart in Scotland and England will be further reinforced.

It is already clear that Farage's anti-immigrant, little Englander bile has far less resonance in Scotland. It is also clear that in any in/out referendum on Europe a large majority of Scots would opt to remain in the EU, in contrast to the apparent mood down south.

Another Tory govt

Secondly, with the polls now showing Labour and the Tories neck and neck in the race for the 2015 Westminster General election, there is the very real prospect of another Tory Government being returned to lord it over Scotland for another five

years. That is hardly likely to help the No campaign.

The monthly 'poll of polls' for March has shown support for Yes now standing at 44 per cent once the 'don't knows' have been eliminated. And therefore a third important factor that could swing September's result is the impact of the impressive grassroots Yes Scotland movement which has been built up steadily over the past two years and is now being widely compared to the anti-Poll Tax federation of the 1990s.

The SSP National Council last weekend took reports from around the country and found increasing support for Yes as the independence campaign enters its final six months.

With the Yes Scotland movement now present and active in every town and village in the country the role of highly motivated political activists like us may well prove decisive if the vote is as close as anticipated. And Labour may well be left to rue the March day it decided to slap potential devo max supporters in the face.

CAMPBELL MARTIN BRITISH UNIONISTS AND THE COMPANY THEY KEEP

by Campbell Martin

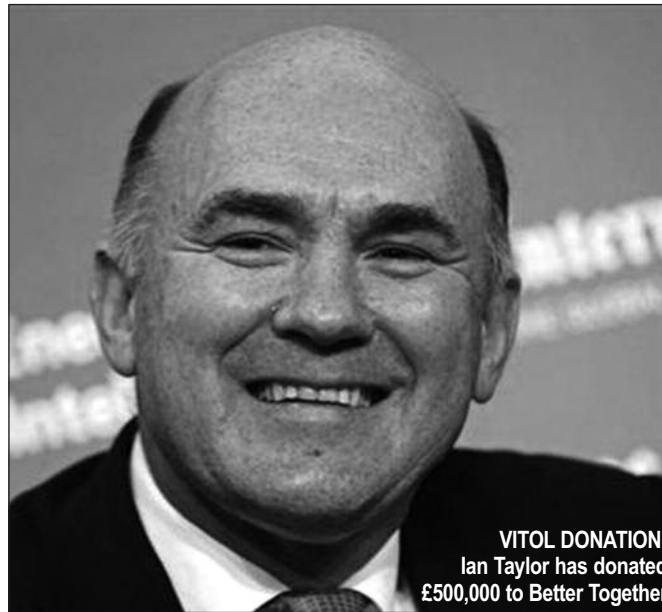
RECENTLY, THE Chief Executive of oil corporation Shell said a Yes vote in September's independence referendum would introduce greater uncertainty into the industry.

Ben van Beurden's comments were reported on every newspaper front-page and in every news bulletin. The stories carried the same message, that the input of the Shell boss was a damaging blow to the case for Scottish independence. Apparently, none of the journalists or reporters thought to ask Shell or Mr van Beurden why an independent Scotland would introduce greater uncertainty into the oil industry, particularly when Shell's own website states the company "operates in over 90 countries and has around 101,000 employees".

Shell manages to operate in almost 100 independent countries, but if the people of Scotland decide to govern their own country, then that would cause problems. Clearly, Ben van Beurden's intervention was politically motivated: he was doing a favour for the Tory-led British Government. Not only did the pro-British Union media ignore the reality of Shell's worldwide operations to portray Mr van Beurden's comments as a blow to the independence campaign, the Tory-funded Better Together campaign also got involved, immediately posting an item on its website, declaring the Shell boss had said "there are huge risks involved in Scotland leaving the UK". Ben van Beurden didn't actually say that, but Better Together never let the truth get in the way of a scare-story.

Racist regime

Perhaps, though, the British Unionist coalition of Tory, Labour and Liberal Democrats should be wary of the company they appear happy to keep. One of the independent countries Shell formerly operated in was South Africa under the racist apartheid regime, which treated the black majority population as very much second-class citizens. Of course, the then British Tory Govern-



VITOL DONATION:
Ian Taylor has donated
£500,000 to Better Together

ment, led by Margaret Thatcher, also supported the apartheid regime, opposing international sanctions and branding Nelson Mandela a 'terrorist'. In 1987, the New York-based National Council of Churches (Africa office) published a pamphlet in which the respected South African churchman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, called for a boycott of Shell and its products. The pamphlet explained: "The Boycott of Royal Dutch/Shell is part of a world wide effort to bring about peaceful change in South Africa by ending international economic support for apartheid. Shell is one of the most important suppliers to the South African government of materials essential to the maintenance of apartheid. Shell fuels the police and military with crucial oil and petroleum products (South Africa has no oil of its own), Shell owns South Africa's largest oil refinery and Shell exports key South African goods, particularly coal. Instead of joining peaceful efforts to end apartheid, Shell is helping to prolong the struggle against injustice in South Africa."

Shell also operates in Nigeria, where it has racked-up massive profits while wrecking the ecology of the area populated by the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta. Local people have seen no benefit from the oil extracted by Shell. On the contrary, some report illnesses caused by massive leaks of

oil into the environment. In 2009, Shell reached an out-of-court settlement, in which the company agreed to pay \$15.5million to prevent a trial where it was charged with crimes against humanity, torture, inhumane treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and involvement in the execution in 1995 of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other leaders of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Court papers had been lodged in New York by the son of Ken Saro-Wiwa: Shell was within days of having to defend itself. The company denied the charges and said the out-of-court settlement was simply part of a reconciliation process with the Ogoni people.

The money was paid to the relatives of those killed in 1995, with part of the funds being used to set up a development trust for the Ogoni. Between 1993 and 1995 Ken Saro-Wiwa was Vice Chair of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), which is an international, non-violent body representing indigenous peoples, minorities and unrecognised or occupied territories. UNPO seeks to protect and promote human and cultural rights, to preserve the environment and to find non-violent solutions to conflicts.

In January 1993, when MOSOP organised peaceful marches of around 300,000 Ogoni people, protesting against the activities of Shell in their communities, the Niger-

ian Government backed Shell and imposed a military occupation of the area to allow the oil corporation to continue its operations.

In May 1994 four Ogoni chiefs were murdered. At the time, the Nigerian Government had banned Ken Saro-Wiwa from entering Ogoni land, but he was subsequently arrested and accused of having incited others to carry out the murders. Following a year of imprisonment, Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP leaders – Saturday Dobee, Daniel Gbooko, Baribor Bera, Nordu Eawo, Felix Naute, Paul Levera, John Kpuine, Barinem Kiobel – were found guilty by a specially-convened tribunal and sentenced to death.

Some of the defendants' lawyers resigned in protest during the trial, alleging the outcome had been rigged by the Nigerian Government. Many of the prosecution 'witnesses' later admitted they had been bribed by the government and had been told what to say in their evidence. Two of the 'witnesses' stated that, in addition to financial bribes, they had been promised jobs with Shell, and that this offer was made in the presence of Shell's lawyers. Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni leaders who had led mass protests against the activities of Shell were hanged on 10 November 1995.

Vitol's No donation

More recently, in January of this year, Shell announced the sale of its Australian petrol stations and refinery to the Vitol Group for 2.9billion Australian dollars (£1.5billion). Vitol's president and chief executive is a man called Ian Taylor: the same Ian Taylor who has donated £500,000 to the pro-British Union Better Together campaign. Back in 1995 Vitol paid \$1million to the Serbian war criminal Arkan to 'settle a score' over a secret oil deal to supply Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia with fuel.

So, there you have it – Tory, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Better Together and their pro-British Union friends. What is it they say about being able to judge people by the company they keep?

LESLEY
RIDDOCH

BLOSSOM

What Scotland Needs to Flourish

Riddoch's Scotland with no frills and no punches pulled

Book review: *Blossom – What Scotland Needs to Flourish* by **Lesley Riddoch**. Luath Press, £11.99

by *Felicity Garvie*

ON ONE level, this book by feminist writer and broadcaster Lesley Riddoch can be enjoyed (and I did, very much) simply as an excellent piece of grassroots investigative journalism into the current condition of Scotland, its health, housing, wealth and land inequalities, local democracy, language, culture and women.

She has spent the last 15 years travelling Scotland speaking to, hearing the stories and recording the voices of, ordinary men and women suffering under the legacy of this country's historic inequalities but struggling to the best of their abilities and resources, to transform their lives.

Determination

She holds up a mirror to 21st century Scotland with no frills and no punches pulled – and the result will make you want to cry and sometimes to laugh and wonder at human resilience. Her determination to record truthfully the real lives of the working class is impressive, and backed up with useful research and statistics.

On another level it can certainly be read as a contribution to the debate on independence – and I would recommend

it very much in this context. You don't have to agree with her conclusions but the facts require an answer and she certainly supplied a few explanations for questions that I, as an English person living here for many years, have about the modern Scots identity.

She asks why Scotland has so far failed to realise its enormous potential in terms of the human talent and huge natural resources we have at our disposal, and her basic contention is that modern Scotland is both moulded and restrained by historic, centuries-long inequalities of wealth distribution and land ownership persisting unchallenged into the present day.

Chronic poor health and inadequate housing, not only in the most deprived areas, have sapped the strength of Scots and led to a lack of self-confidence. Huge, top-down structures such as Glasgow City Council have traditionally dominated the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, throttling grassroots democracy in a paternalistic way so that most local people never had the chance to change and shape their own communities. In most European countries by contrast, councils

are far smaller and much more local, so that the elected representatives are much closer (literally) to their voters.

There are positive examples such as Tommy Riley, who started a successful men's self-help group in Drumchapel to combat addiction (until the funding was stopped); Dr Mary Hepburn, obstetrician to the poor; the islanders of Eigg who in 1997 bought out the long-entrenched landowners; or the people of West Whitlawburn (South Lanarkshire) who were not prepared to wait any longer for the housing association to attend to their repairs, taking control of their own neighbourhood and a million-pound budget for repair, refurbishment and upgrade of their homes which transformed their scheme.

But the huge inequities in present-day Scotland continue to determine negative outcomes in terms of people taking control.

This in turn leads to pessimism, poor mental health and the lack of self-belief which can hold us back. One fascinating aspect is the com-

parisons Riddoch makes with Norway (and the Nordic culture generally) where she has spent a lot of time. It has a climate, landscape and population very similar to ours – but they make much better use of it in terms of spending time outdoors, many of them owning wooden huts in the country to escape city life at weekends, being close to nature, animals and enjoying the benefits of exercise and the fresh air.

There is a tradition of that here too (friends hill-walking together, families camping etc) but not anything like on the same scale. Which brings us back to ownership of our land – it's a case, as she says of 'Look but don't touch'.

Bold solutions

Riddoch is not afraid to outline the changes that must be made. In her view, we're stuck in short-term thinking and don't trust ourselves or others to move forward with bold solutions. We must take responsibility starting from the ground up in order to empower ourselves.

"Change will only come when people can visualise things being otherwise," she writes, and the value of this book is that it supplies a myriad of reasons why Scotland can thrive.

There it is again, that word vision that is becoming so important in the independence debate. Ensuring a 'Yes' vote in September is the first step in that direction – but only if we take control and change our lives. As a socialist I believe we have a duty to encourage that vision, organise in solidarity with others and plan for a fundamental transformation of capitalist society to rid Scotland once and for all of the inequalities that hold us down and back.



by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

"We live in the eighth richest country on the planet."

"Do we? You could've fooled me. It doesn't feel like it to me."

THAT EXCHANGE, which I had with a woman in Govan in Glasgow as we campaigned for people to 'vote Yes for a decent living wage', sums up the obscene inequality we face.

And it captures a central reason to win independence and then rebuild society in the interests of the millions rather than the millionaires.

The poverty is etched on the faces of people passing our SSP street stalls in areas like Govan and Drumchapel.

Many clutch messages from the cheapest shops, desperately trying to juggle feeding their families with meeting fuel bills and clothing the kids.

Much of the cheapest food is the unhealthiest, depriving people of a quality of life available to the well off.

Poverty kills

Poverty stalks the eighth-richest country in the world, and it's rising. A "humanitarian crisis" is how anti-poverty campaigns recently described the fact nearly a million Scots are below the breadline, including one in five kids.

Poverty wrecks lives. It limits people's enjoyment and social life. It means poor diet.

Those living on an expanding island of poverty in a sea of wealth are bombarded daily with the 'must have' adverts – which make people feel inadequate because they don't have the commodities way beyond their reach. It adds to life's stresses. Poverty kills.

The mortality rates from heart disease (100 per 100,000

Vote Yes to a minimum £9-an-hour living wage

“ We are in the eighth-richest country on earth, but also the fourth most unequal. One decisive measure to dismantle that obscene contradiction is a decent minimum wage...”

people) is twice as high in deprived areas as Scotland's average rate. Cancer mortality rates (200 per 100,000) is 50 per cent higher in deprived districts than Scotland's average – and they haven't fallen for the past decade, even though the national average has, by one-sixth.

The sad, shocking statistic that most clearly condemns this capitalist system of built-in inequality is the fact a boy born in one of the poorest 10 per cent of areas will live 14 years less than boys born in the wealthiest districts; for girls the equivalent is 8 years less of a lifespan.

People are being battered by a hurricane of rising fuel prices, rocketing food costs, inflation-busting rent rises, savage benefits cuts and sustained, systematic lowering of wage rates.

The number of people wandering round shops with barely a penny to their name because of DWP benefit sanctions is heartbreaking.

I spoke to the woman who'd been docked £35 because she had missed one out of a dozen appointments, for which she had never received the letter because a neighbour had been away from home and the letter mistakenly delivered to him.

But the government cuts machine showed no mercy. Another woman suffered benefit sanctions because she did voluntary UNPAID work and turned up slightly late one day!

Worse to come

And worse is yet to come if we remain under the dictatorship of the benefit-slashing millionaires at Westminster.

A recent leak from the DWP proposed charging claimants for making appeals – even though 56 per cent of current appeals are upheld, proving that unfair decisions on an already punitive benefits system are rampant.

Reason enough to vote Yes in September and organise to build a new welfare system that is a safety net for the sick, disabled, elderly, young or unemployed – not a truncheon to bludgeon them over the heads with.



CHANGE: folk trapped in poverty have the most to gain from escaping the Westminster rule of bankers and billionaires

PHOTO: Simon Whittle

But it's a stark, scandalous fact that the absolute majority of those in poverty actually work to remain poor! Pathetic wages, the spread of part-time work, underemployment – all combine to make wages a source of poverty for nearly half a million workers in Scotland.

Wages are stagnant – and in real terms consistently falling since 2010. In the 1970s and 1980s wages rose by an average of 2.9 per cent each year. That trend slowed down in the 1990s (1.5 per cent) and 2000s (1.2 per cent), but since 2010 real wages have **FALLEN** by an average of 2.2 per cent every single year.

On top of that, the number of Scottish workers in part time jobs wanting full time work has rocketed (120,000 by 2012).

At the other end of exploitation, vast numbers in work are stressed out from working long hours – including the daylight robbery of doing unpaid overtime.

The TUC's latest report shows 5.42 million workers in the UK gave their employers about £640million worth of work free of charge last year!

The struggle for a decent living minimum wage of £9 an hour for all over 16 – a modest figure, two-thirds male median earnings in this country – is pivotal to banishing poverty. And it's another prime reason to vote Yes.

There's a better chance of snowballs surviving Hell than of getting the three rival factions of capitalist exploiters at Westminster to concede £9 an hour.

Public subsidy

Successive Tory and Labour governments have passed laws to keep wages low.

Even when the demands and pressure of the trade union movement helped force the last Labour government to introduce what became Working Tax Credits, that was

a public subsidy to low-paying employers.

It costs taxpayers between £5.9billion and £6.3billion every year in Scotland. It's the working class subsidising bosses to pay other workers a low wage! An independent Scotland wouldn't automatically guarantee a solution, but it would open the door to one.

It would give working class people, including their trade unions and socialists, the chance to organise and demand a living wage of £9 minimum rather than prop up the exploiters through public subsidies.

The likes of the multinational retailers – who now make up by far the biggest employers – could well afford such a wage out of their multi-billioned profits. Taxation of the rich – including the wealthiest 100 Scots who have a bigger combined income than the Holyrood government's annual budget! – could easily fund

such a decent income in the public sector.

And those micro-businesses who genuinely don't have the profit levels to pay £9 an hour to the couple of workers they employ for useful work could be subsidised. Yes, we are in the eighth-richest country on earth, but also the fourth most unequal. One decisive measure to dismantle that obscene contradiction is a decent minimum wage.

Breadline benefits

Those on poverty pay and breadline benefits have the most to gain from escaping the rule of the bankers, billionaires and bosses who dictate policy at Westminster.

Voting Yes is not a vote for Alex Salmond. It's a vote to shape our own future and boost the prospects of winning decent wages, living benefits, and a future socialist Scotland where little kids will ask:

"What was poverty?"

USDAW stitch-up on referendum

by an USDAW shop steward

THE LABOUR-dominated leadership of USDAW has stooped to a new low in their rush to impress the anti-independence Labour leadership, trampling on the democracy of the union in the process. The Better Together alliance of Tories, Lib Dems and Labour are making much of the affiliation of the fourth-largest union in the UK.

But the fanfares can't drown out the rising voices of anger in the ranks of the union at how the whole decision was arrived at.

Looking at what has happened prior to this week's press statements (falsely) claiming "82 per cent of USDAW vote against independence", you should bear in mind the methods used to debate the crunch issues around the referendum in the next-biggest union in the country, PCS.

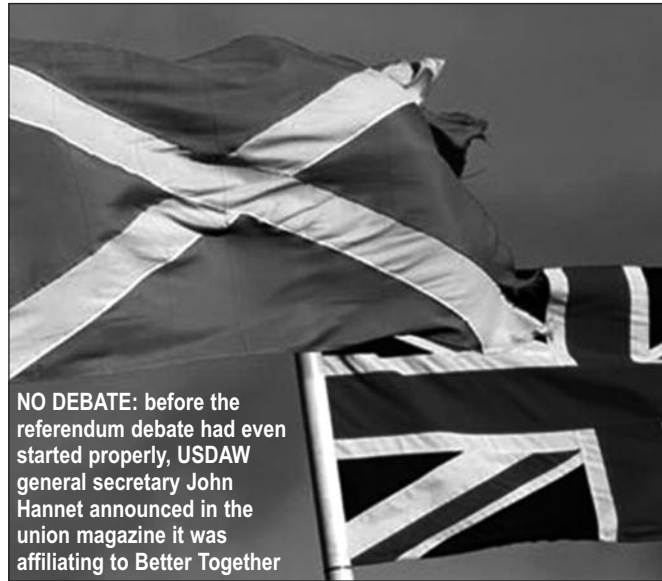
Competing views

PCS leaders issued a document to every single Scottish member with equal space provided for advocates of three competing views of what PCS should do, officially, as a national union: support a Yes vote, support a No vote, or inform the members without backing either the Yes or No campaigns.

While their conference backed taking no position, not a single vote was cast for No.

No such risks of members' views prevailing have been taken by the leadership of my union, USDAW. Before the referendum debate had even started properly, USDAW general secretary John Hannet announced in the union magazine it was affiliating to Better Together.

No prior consultation with Scottish branches or Scottish members before they got into bed with the Tory party that low-paid retail workers overwhelmingly re-



NO DEBATE: before the referendum debate had even started properly, USDAW general secretary John Hannet announced in the union magazine it was affiliating to Better Together

vile. Last year the UK-wide Executive Committee of USDAW issued a document declaring USDAW had decided to affiliate to Better Together, "not by clinging to a piece of ideology, but by carefully considering the evidence for and against independence".

Where they got their evidence is still unclear: it certainly did not involve democratic debates between representatives of the Yes and No campaigns.

No branch debates were arranged, no circulation of the members with arguments for and against independence, no widely advertised Scottish conference after a series of branch meetings deciding their members' views through vigorous debate.

In the year since, USDAW officials, including Scottish Divisional Officer Lawrence Wason, have spared no time or effort in pumping out press releases attacking independence, including shamelessly parroting the comments of chief executives of the big supermarkets 'concerns' about Scottish self government.

It seems they listen more to the supermarket bosses than supermarket workers who pay their subs to USDAW, but whose views have never been sought in any transparent, fashion before or since USDAW leaders affiliated

our union to Better Together. Now, in a new low in cynicism, the leadership presented the recent Scottish Divisional Conference with one speaker on the Referendum – Alistair Darling, chief of Better Together – and then held a vote of delegates to rubber stamp a No vote imposed on us by the UK leadership for the best part of two years!

No speaker was even invited to debate with Darling from those who support Yes. No prior publicity in the USDAW branches alerted members to this discussion or to Darling's presence. No pretence of the democratic procedures used by PCS.

Despite the charms of Alistair Darling, with nobody invited to challenge his arguments, around 40-50 per cent of the delegates didn't vote one way or the other, making the claims to 82 per cent endorsement totally bogus.

82 per cent of the 50-60 per cent who did vote is not even a majority of the actual delegates!

And then in their Press Release, Lawrence Wason claims, "We have listened to our members' views, investigated the pros and cons of independence, and come to the conclusion we are stronger and better together."

As an USDAW shop steward told the Sunday Herald, "It has

been a completely cynical exercise and a stitch-up."

USDAW members are already sick and tired of being bombarded by national union magazines and emails dominated by articles preaching the wonders of Labour and Ed Miliband even though they backed the other Miliband brother for Labour leader!!

They are less than overjoyed that £12million of our members' subs have been handed over to Labour since 2001, after Labour's record in government of continued low pay and sustained Tory anti-union laws.

But this latest episode is a crude exercise in sucking up to Labour, making no genuine attempt to consult the opinions of members in Scotland. When the USDAW leadership coyly refer to Better Together as "a cross party campaign" they hope to smother the news that they have joined up with the Tories and Lib Dems.

Members' money

We await news of how many tens of thousands of pounds of our members' money has been handed over to Better Together!

But members won't be so easily fooled. We don't need No propaganda when we face massive job losses – and crushingly low pay – under the rule of successive Tory, Lib Dem and Labour governments at Westminster. And when our Scottish Divisional Officer issues a press release trumpeting support for Better Together and carries – quotes from multi-millioned chief executives of ASDA, Morrisons and Sainsbury's whose views do they really listen to?

The members of USDAW will have their say on 18 September, and it might not be to the liking of Alistair Darling or our own national leadership!

• *This is an edited version of an article first published by newsnetscotland.com*

Allan Grogan of Labour for Independence reports for the Voice

Indy case put forward at Labour's Perth conference

I SPOKE at a Law Society fringe event at Labour's Scottish conference. My intention was to set out the main argument which those within the Labour movement should be debating.

I began by setting out the gross inequality which is prevalent in Scotland. One in every four children living in poverty, fuel, food and other retail price increases while wages stagnate. Working families struggling in abject squalor while bankers get richer, MPs take a 11.5 per cent pay rise and Trident is being renewed at the cost of £100billion.

The case for an independent Scotland lies in improving the lives of the people who live here. For too long we have waited on a British road to socialism and yet we are further and further away from that becoming a reality.

This is a strong case that can be made in a debate in which the labour movement was founded upon. I looked forward to hearing the opposing arguments, how the British state can find a way to improve the lives of all who live there not just those who can afford to have their say.

Leadership wishes

Sadly this did not occur, rather than focussing on this crucial issue, Margaret Curran stressed again and again, that she had never heard of me.

This would have been more insulting if she hadn't remembered Dennis Healy, despite being a party member when he was Chancellor.

What was more worrying was the paid Labour officials and Better Together drones who, rather than engage in the debate, decided their sole mission was to heckle myself and anyone in the audience who dared go against the leadership's wishes.

This occurred in spite of former First Minister Henry McLeish persistent requests that Labour must



ALLAN GROGAN:
"A Labour Party can play the leading role in an independent Scotland, but it must accept their follies and embrace the need for real and lasting change"

listen to and respect dissenting opinion within its ranks.

This is a worrying trend for a party seemingly insistent on demeaning anyone daring to hope for a Labour Party based on the principles of which it was built. Throughout this referendum campaign I have met a great number of people who are no longer Labour supporters after they felt the party left them not the other way around.

The latest polling indicates that 34 per cent of those who voted Labour are now planning to vote Yes. If the party continues on this course of alienating and demeaning those who support independence then they are likely to do great harm to a party already crumbling under lost foundations of democracy, equality and social justice.

Those who were there to listen and debate on the No side of the argument will no doubt be worried in the lack of any semblance of positive arguments for maintaining the union. I spoke to some individuals later at conference, one who had attended the debate and now was even more

concerned at the neoliberalism of the British state. This was the audience that was looking for a debate at the meeting and instead only heard the positives of independence and the crass personal attacks from the no campaign.

Later in the day at conference, I watched Johann Lamont deliver her key note address. In it she mentioned Alex Salmond and the SNP no fewer than 15 times.

I have never understood the need to incessantly mention the opposition, it just seems to provide them with free publicity. In her speech she defended the Devolution Commission's proposals, this set of ill thought out half measures were so incoherent that even Gordon Brewer, no friend of neutral broadcasting cut it to pieces.

There are higher hopes for the proposed Red Paper which will set out the agenda for Labour in power in Scotland. In particular lifting 100,000 children out of poverty, an end to the Bedroom Tax and 25 hours of free childcare a week. Yet questions still remain unanswered as to how

they will afford it in light of a speculated £4billion cut in the Barnett formula. How can we raise the finances to give Scotland the society it deserves?

It seems the only proposal is to increase the top rate of tax to 50 per cent. This will account for a paltry £10million so where do we find the rest?

The only way we can create a fair and equal society is to ensure we have the powers to create a growing and sustainable economy.

By using our finite resources we can reinvest in our industrial and manufacturing industries, rebuild construction by building social housing and creating lasting economic prosperity by investing in our renewable energy potential.

Levers of power

All of this can only be achieved by giving the Scottish Parliament the levers of power to ensure a more prosperous, fair, equal and socially just society. One in which the founding figures of the Labour Party dreamed about upon its creation.

Labour for Independence will do all it can to convince the Labour movement in Scotland that a socialist, nuclear free society is possible, but only with a Yes vote on 18 September.

We will work with our comrades in the Scottish Socialist Party, respected figures like Jim Sillars, Margo MacDonald, John Finnie and Jean Urquhart that independence need not mean UK lite, but a progressive nation that cares for all its citizens not just those who can afford to have their say.

A Labour Party can play the leading role in this, but it must accept their follies and embrace the need for real and lasting change.

by John Finnie MSP

Holyrood debates Palestine water

ACADEMICS HAVE long discussed whether, in times of man-made climate change, with industrial irrigation and power generation schemes and trans-boundary rivers dammed, future wars would be fought over water rather than oil. Certainly water is the basic commodity by which we all survive and withholding it from any community could be a death sentence.

On 4 March, Parliament debated a motion, in the name of my friend and colleague Claudia Beamish, Labour Member for the South of Scotland, titled 'Thirsting for Justice', about water and sanitation in Palestine.

In November 2012, during the ceasefire after the 'Pillar of Defence' assault by the Israeli forces, Claudia and I were part of a European parliamentary delegation to Gaza. The fact-finding visit was organised by the Council for European Palestinian Relations who work hard to highlight and resolve issues in Palestine.

Resilience

A few things stand out from that visit, the resilience of a charming, well-educated population and their stoicism in the face of horrendous oppression by their callous neighbour, Israel.

The choice of water justice for Palestine as subject for this debate was, as Claudia said, 'a symbol and proxy for all the other injustices that make Palestinians' lives pretty impossible'. The debate was also timely, as Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, had a short time previous raised water issues in the Israeli Parliament.

With one notable exception I shall come to later, the debate enjoyed great cross-party support. MSPs quoted from the UN and Amnesty and cited the simple facts of water and sanitation succinctly laid out in the motion; "Parliament understands that the average daily consumption of water of Palestinian people to cover domestic and public service needs is around 70 litres per person; believes that this is well



below the 100 litre limit recommended by the World Health Organization; understands that Israeli policies and practices limit access to water for people in Palestine to less than they are entitled to under international law."

The motion then gave much detailed information on the water crisis faced by the Palestinians and applauded Thirsting for Justice which works directly with communities in the west Bank and Gaza, and noted that it encourages European citizens to put pressure on Israel to comply with international law and for human rights to be respected in Palestine.

Of course there is little new in this issue. Amnesty International's 2009 report 'Troubled Waters: Palestinians denied fair access to water' made clear how Israel restricts the import of equipment that relates to water supplies. That Report stating many families in the occupied Palestinian territories 'have to spend as much as a quarter ... of their income on water' and we know that is for water of questionable quality and from dubious sources.

Meantime the 450,000 Israeli settlers who live in the West Bank, in violation of international law, use as much water as or more water than the Palestinian population of 2.3 million.

During the debate, I commended the Friends of the Earth report 'En-

vironmental Nakba: Environmental injustice and violations of the Israeli occupation of Palestine' which talks, first of all, about the world's apparent indifference to the plight of the Palestinian people, particularly those in Gaza, then goes on to say: 'Even more ignored has been the wholesale grabbing of fertile land and water resources and the environmental pollution and destruction due to industrial and nuclear waste dumping.'

Sadly, for a brief 4 minutes of a very consensual debate we heard the utterings of the Israeli media machine. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the words came from a Tory, John Lamont. Mr Lamont, a past guest of the Israeli regime, told an angry chamber that 'In the occupied Palestinian territories there are complex issues with water resources that are in part due to the challenging natural environment, but are also due to mismanagement of water resources.'

A 2013 UN Report stated '90 per cent of water in the underlying coastal aquifer beneath the Gaza Strip is unfit for human consumption as a result of pollution caused by raw sewage and rising seawater infiltration. It highlighted Israel 'extracts a disproportionate share of the water from the coastal aquifer' and prevents access to 'water from the Wadi Gaza, a natural stream that originates in the Hebron Mountains'.

Gaza's water situation is further exacerbated by the on-going blockade and military action which undermines any chance of rebuilding and the Report states, 'Israel has destroyed at least 306 wells in the Access Restricted Areas of Gaza since 2005. In this context, the Special Rapporteur strongly condemns the targeting of water and sanitation facilities during Israeli military operations, which cannot be justified as a military necessity, and cannot be explained as a consequence of accidents.'

Mr Lamont, who declined to accept any interventions from myself or others, could not have been clearer, or indeed more ignorant, when he said 'I suggest that the real issue is Palestinian mismanagement.'

Propaganda

I highlight that depressing Tory view to show that, notwithstanding the wealth of impartial reporting and analysis, the Israeli propaganda machine is highly effective and generally enjoys an easy ride from the Western media.

When Claudia and I returned from Gaza we made a commitment to regularly do something practical for Palestine. At this time we are in active dialogue with the Minister for External Affairs and International Development, Humza Yousaf, trade unions, Scottish Water and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East about support for possible partnership water projects and would hope to be able to report some positive news shortly.

Dialogue not guns will resolve the situation in the Palestine but it will all count for nothing if the citizens have to live with insufficient water and no sewage system. It's time for the West to act. Israel must be made to respect international law and humanitarian norms and ensure clean water and adequate sewage for the region. Until then Palestine will continue to thirst for justice.

by Sandra Webster

THE REFERENDUM is only six months away. It is time to look beyond the headlines and explain how independence has the potential to change lives. The Scottish Government estimates that there are 650,000 unpaid carers in Scotland that is one in eight of the population and those are only the folk who identified themselves as carers at the last census. They contribute ten billion pounds of free care to the Scottish economy. How can they be persuaded to vote Yes? Especially as their votes could be crucial.

Carers are the ultimate low paid workers. Often unable to seek paid employment many have to survive on household benefits and Carer's Allowance, which is paid only if you care more than 35 hours a week for someone who is deemed in need of care. The payment is £59.75.

Daily challenge

Most families with a disabled person live in poverty and are unable to work or study full time economic inequality is a daily challenge for them any step to eradicate poverty in their lives would be welcomed.

While we rightly highlight the need for a living wage for those in employment we also need to look at a policy that will support unpaid carers during their caring journey.

Carers want the choice and flexibility to decide how many hours they want to care even if the person they care for lives with them. The harsh reality for many is that the cuts are having a huge impact on day services and respite.

The mantra seems to be that carers have to share dwindling resources while becoming more exhausted.

Community care is fast becoming an army of exhausted women who are

INDEPENDENCE NEEDS CARERS TOO

DAILY STRUGGLE: carers want the choice and flexibility to decide how many hours they want to care even if the person they care for lives with them



expected to carry on regardless. Don't make a fuss, dears.

A huge postcode of lottery currently exists all over Scotland. A carer moving from Dumfries would be dismayed at the services and supports available to them in Glasgow.

A hope for independence would be that there would be more equal provision throughout Scotland and a basic marker of the services everyone could expect. Rather than decide what this should be it needs to be negotiated directly with carers not only the organisations that represent them.

So some practical support that carers have defined as issues that impact on them.

However what carers need most of all is to be listened too. In the move towards the referendum potential voters are designated as being part of a "sector", caring is mostly women's work and undervalued even more so than childcare which at least was highlighted in the Scottish Government's white paper.

The tide is turning with carer's attitudes with many not prepared to accept what they are given but demand more.

Carer's union

There may even be a Carer's union coming soon to Scotland with the support of Unite the Community. Carers may be preparing to come out of the shadows and not be content to be placed in an appropriate tick box. Carers who truly are the heartbeat of our society have so much to offer the independence debate.

The truth is we need them as much as they need our support. Carers issues are more than welfare issues.

They should make us look more closely at our policies such as a living wage be considered from their perspective too. 600,000 votes has the potential to deliver the referendum but we need to ensure carers are empowered and feel that independence has something to offer them. We ignore them at our peril and at the peril of our greatest prize – independence.



Join the SSP

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: 07810205747

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Bill Bonnar looks at a progressive example in Latin America

ALBA's Bolivarian currency union

MUCH OF the current debate on Scottish independence centres on the issue of currency and whether a future independent Scotland should enter a currency union with what remains of the United Kingdom; in effect operating within a sterling zone.

The left have already made their position clear; currency union is perfectly feasible and would almost certainly be agreed by Westminster but is hardly desirable. As currently proposed such a union would seriously undermine Scotland's independence.

Currency unions are common around the world and take many forms but perhaps the most exciting to emerge in recent years has been that launch by ALBA; the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America. Alba was formed from a joint initiative by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004. Its aim to promote the economic, social and political integration of South America and the Caribbean and to lessen the domination of the United States.

Virtual currency

Specifically it is seen as an alternative to the 'Free Trade Agreement for the Americas' promoted by Washington.

ALBA currently consists on ten countries; Cuba, Venezuela, Antigua & Barbuda, Bolivia, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, St Vincent & the Grenadines, St Lucia and most recently Surinam.

In 2010 ALBA launched a virtual currency; the Sucre, to be used in trade deals between these countries. The first such deal took place between Cuba and Venezuela. In 2013 deals totalling the equivalent \$850 million took place. The eventual aim is to turn it into a hard currency to replace the dollar as the main trading currency of the region.

This is the latest development in a process which has transformed Latin American societies in recent years. Since 2000 a range of left of centre governments have come to power in the region. They range from the overtly socialist to the mildly social democratic but despite their differences they share much in common.

The first is an almost total rejection of the kind of neoliberal, free market economics which so devastated their economies in the eighties and nineties; in fact the coming to power of these governments was a direct political response to the economic carnage caused. In its place is recognition that the

state should play a central role in economic development.

The second is the belief that problems of poverty and inequality cannot be solved without significant state intervention. The idea that economic growth alone or the much vaunted 'trickle down' approach will eradicate poverty has been rejected. Poverty and inequality are structural in nature and require ambitious social programmes to deal with them.



The Third is that Latin America can no longer be regarded as the United States backyard. This means an end to the Munroe Doctrine which stated that the United States had the right to intervene in the affairs of its southern neighbours.

This led to a century of murder, repression and exploitation. In its place is the Bolivarian dream of a united Latin America and the Caribbean and in the short term a growing movement of alliance and integration.

Simon Bolívar, the 19th century liberation hero had something very much in common with modern proponents of independence. Such independence shouldn't be an end in itself but rather a means to an end; the eradication of poverty and exploitation and the creation of a better society. If this is not the

aim then independence has little meaning.

He also combined a sense of nationalism with a firm commitment to internationalism. His dream was the creation of a kind of United States of Latin America on similar lines to the USA. That dream is now being pursued across the continent and beyond.

A process of alliance and integration is gathering pace through trade pacts, cross country economic projects, political and military alliances. ALBA is the most prominent example of this but extends well beyond the ALBA countries.

It is this process which so concerns the United States. In the past they have been able to isolate and pick off progressive governments usually with bloody consequences. This is much more difficult today because of the alliances which have been formed.

In 1973 the Socialist Unity government of Salvador Allende was overthrown in a violent military coup organised by the United States. Its programme was not dissimilar to that of a number of current South American governments today.

If that government was now in power in Chile it would probably survive because of the support of its neighbours.

Powerful enemy

This continental movement for progressive change faces monumental social and economic problems caused by a century and a half of capitalist and imperialist repression and exploitation.

It faces a powerful foreign enemy in the form of the United States working tirelessly to reverse what has happen and reactionary opposition at home.

Yet in a little over decade its achievements have been impressive in terms of sustained and sustainable economic growth, ambitious social programmes and the strengthening of democracy.

The dream of Simon Bolívar and his modern day equivalents such as Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro is now realistic and realisable.

by Bill Bonnar

CRIMEA CRISIS SPOTLIGHTS THE HYPOCRISY OF THE WEST

LET US be clear about the nature of the Russian regime under Vladimir Putin. Russia is ruled by a capitalist dictatorship. It may have the outward appearance of democracy but in fact is controlled by a wealthy and often criminal elite.

They select the president then use all the power of the Russian state to secure victory in the presidential elections. This includes almost total control of the media, unlimited access to state funds to finance the election campaign and control of the electoral process itself in order to ensure victory.

Once elected, the president has dictatorial power until the next election when the process is repeated. The regime presides over an almost perpetual social and economic crisis brought about by the introduction of capitalism.

Whatever the shortcomings of the former Soviet Union, its collapse has proved a disaster for the Russian people by just about every definition of the term disaster one can think of.

Parasitic elite

Nearly quarter of a century on every indicator from economic performance to social spending to living standards exists at a level significantly below that of Soviet times unless you are a member of the largely parasitic elite who have done well out of capitalism.

To counter this the regime has promoted its authoritarian nature as strong government, popular with a people worn down by lawlessness and a sense of defeat. It has also wrapped itself in the banner of Russian nationalism defending the country from internal and external enemies.

Given the above does that make Russian actions in Crimea beyond the pale to be opposed at all costs. In fact Russia can make a solid and



PROPAGANDA: the poster reads 'On March 16 we choose'

objective case for its actions. Crimea historically is part of greater Russia with a majority Russian speaking population who see themselves far closer to Moscow than Kiev.

It is the home of Russia's Black Sea fleet the loss of which would represent a major military blow to the country. Crimea's links with Ukraine are tenuous to say the least. Crimea was only 'gifted' to Ukraine in 1954 by Khrushchev.

Moscow would also have viewed events of recent weeks with growing alarm. The elected Ukrainian president is overthrown by a Ukrainian nationalist movement many of whom have strong fascist links. When Moscow declares that the entire movement is fascist they do so for obvious propaganda reasons but with all good propaganda there is more than an element of truth.

It also plays on historic fears by Russians of the time they were invaded by Nazi Germany and, in Ukraine, the role collaborationist role played by Ukrainian nationalists. Put bluntly, if there were a left wing government in Moscow its ac-

tions would be unlikely to be much different.

The response from the West could not be more hypocritical given its long track record of invasion, conquest and annexation. This is particularly true of Britain. How do they think we acquired an empire in the first place. More than anything else, Russian actions are motivated by security considerations.

The loss of Crimea and its Black Sea facilities was simply unacceptable to Moscow. Given an equivalent situation countries like Britain and America would invade without a moment's hesitation. At the heart of this problem is the unstable nature of an independent Ukraine.

Soviet by-product

Ukraine, as currently formed, is an artificial construct. It emerged as a by-product of the Russian revolution in the form of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic merging into the Soviet Union in 1922. It only re-emerged as an independent state in 1991 largely by default.

The new Ukraine was characterised by social and economic collapse, a catastrophic

decline in living standards, weak central government and the re-emergence of ethnic and national divisions. The crisis in Crimea has been a by-product of this situation.

What is likely to happen next? Russian annexation of Crimea is unlikely to lead to further annexations of Russian speaking areas.

As already stated, Moscow's actions are motivated by security considerations rather than the need to protect ethnic Russians. Also having a large Russian speaking minority in the rest of the Ukraine is to Russia's advantage.

The central problem is in Kiev. As long as the new Ukrainian Government is largely controlled by Ukrainian nationalists it will alienate large sections of the rest of the country and be a recipe for instability. The previous government, although corrupt and shambolic, had a much broader base.

The key test will national elections due later this year. Unless it provides for a government which represents all its citizens it will prove a recipe for instability for years to come.

DAVID AND GOLIATH BATTLE AT FALKIRK GAS ENQUIRY

by Stephanie Pride

TWO WEEKS into what has been characterised as a David and Goliath-style battle between dirty energy company Dart and its local opponents, experts have clashed over the likely impact of what would be the UK's first commercial coalbed methane site near Falkirk.

The plush Inchyra Grange Hotel, where a cup of tea sets you back more than £4, is just one of the venues for a public enquiry which is already behind schedule and producing as much heat as light.

Dart's QC has already tried to discredit the evidence of one of the witnesses for the objectors, Emeritus Prof David Smythe of Glasgow University, by citing his background as a for-

mer punk rocker who has criticised the UK government over its nuclear waste dump plans.

More substantive arguments have ranged over whether or not there is a problem with drilling through faults, experts disagreeing over whether they act as seals or pathways for fugitive gas emissions; and concerns over the proposed development causing the 'de-watering' of old mineworkings, which could generate methane in the old mines.

In all, more than 1,000 documents have been produced relating to the inquiry, which was convened after Falkirk Council delayed its decision on a planning application which would initially see 22 wells drilled at a four-acre site at Letham Moss, near Airth.

The site is just a small part of a licence block covering 367 square kilometres of central Scotland, which could ultimately yield up to 600 billion cubic feet of methane for conversion to energy for the national grid.

The remaining part of the inquiry, which will go on for at least another week, will cover effects on the community, potential health and environmental impacts and plans for waste management.

Campaigners have been encouraged by the fact that MSPs are now considering the introduction of a 2 kilometre exclusion zone around residential properties for gas extraction, as already seen in Australia.

A final decision on the planning application is expected to take around three months.


by Richie Venton

HERE'S A link to a video of the debate on trade unionists and the referendum, held recently. I represented Trade Unionists for Independence at the Skills Development Scotland UNISON branch – in a debate with United for Labour and GMB Scottish organiser Richard Leonard.

Hopefully it's not only useful for yourself, but also other trade unionists you could share it with, as one of many contributions to winning the working class majority to a Yes vote. I believe this clash of arguments should be worth you circulating to other workers as the No camp increasingly try to distance themselves from the toxic Tory-funded Better Together, putting a Labour (and trade union) veneer to their opposition to self government. So feel free to use this as you judge.

• See 'The Great Trade Union Debate - Skills Development Scotland (Unison) debate Scots independence' (link under pic)

Debate vid worth sharing



The Great Trade Union Debate - Skills Development Scotla...

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INDEPENDENCE campaigners have received another boost as a Unison trade union branch sided "positively with the Yes side".

THE GREAT TRADE UNION DEBATE: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSwBRQ-0y40>