

SSP conference: Scotland's socialist party and guests gathered in Edinburgh
• see page 12

Stop TTIP: threat to our democracy must be opposed
• see page 9

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by Sandra Webster, SSP
national co-spokesperson

OUR CONFERENCE of a few weeks ago was an inspiration. Democracy is bursting out all over the SSP. There was great debate and a great mix of older and newer comrades all there to support each other.

We had all come together to begin the fightback and stake our claim to share our vision of an independent socialist Scotland.

Part of this was our unanimous decision to re-establish the women's network—one of the groups I believe will help build the party, as well as being a safe place for women to become more confident and contribute in an environment that is appropriate to us.

It was ironic for example that a Central Glasgow motion was not moved by the woman who had written it because she was unable to attend. Like many of you, I understood the barriers we face to becoming more involved, from the practical to the political.

Women in the party have not been silent or taken a back seat in the last few years. Since I have become more politically active, there have been so many women who continue to support and encourage



LEFT PLATFORM: some west coast delegates arrive for SSP conference

me with their achievements. There are so many women who have been active in their branches, in Women For Independence or as part of the Yes campaign.

For me personally, I have grown more in confidence in the past few years, and so have many of my sisters. Part of the joy of being national co-spokesperson of the SSP has been attending branches and meetings where I have seen a huge increase in women's participation.

There are still many barriers we face in regard to even being able to participate more fully but the re-establishment will enable us to do this.

Discussion about the re-establishment has not popped up from the ether. Over the past two years there have been numerous conversations with many women who can't wait to help establish the network. The consensus was to wait until after the referendum. Now it is time to show our intent and ensure our voices are listened too. We are lucky in our party as we have many new members coming forward as well as others who are more experienced.

We all have something to offer. It will be up to us to define how the network will function but I hope it will be a place for working

class women to come together and gain confidence. That may be the confidence to speak at conference, or to take on a role at a local branch member.

We are women who don't need a t-shirt to declare we are feminists and understand the politics of why such goods should not be produced in a sweatshop where other women are exploited.

There is often talk of the glass ceiling but we are aware that we should not will step up on other women to break through it. Our feminism is born from many different backgrounds and experiences but we will find common ground to work together on.

To achieve this we need our own space and for men to understand why and support us. I believe the women's network will strengthen the party and encourage us to become more diverse and participatory.

For these reasons I am excited for what lies ahead for women in the SSP and hope you feel able to come forward and be involved.

It is also our role to listen to you because a women's network belongs to all of us. A meeting will be arranged soon and we will ensure that all women in the party are contacted.

Scottish Labour's last supper?

by Katie Bonnar

HINDSIGHT IS a wonderful thing. Labour's Gala Dinner in Glasgow was envisaged to be a chance for the party to make sure they got the credit for saving the Union while raising some money from their rich friends.

Instead it looked more like a wake with the party in meltdown and leaderless and MPs looking nervously at

each other wondering if this will be their last supper.

Meanwhile, hundreds gathered outside to show them that the people of Scotland will not forget the role they played during the referendum campaign.

Some protesters came from food banks and happily took donations from passers-by while those inside spent upwards of £200 on their meal.

Since 18 Sept, when huge numbers of hitherto Labour voters moved into open rebellion against the party, they have lost their local branch manager and, if the polls are to be believed, she will be joined by most of her MPs next May.

Maybe for their next Gala Dinner they should play safe and book McDonald's. At least they'll get a 'happy meal'.



by Ken Ferguson

TRULY WE live in brutal times both nationally and internationally, with leading accountants KPMG producing a report showing 5.2 million UK citizens being paid less than a living wage, war raging across the middle east and EU leaders announcing an end to rescue operations for drowning refugees fleeing the results.

The latter decision must be one of the starkest, inhumane and brutal illustrations of the moral bankruptcy of the supposedly all wise rule of the market.

The idea that people faced with war, deprivation and terrorism are making a free choice to board death trap boats to flee to Europe in the belief that they will be rescued by the Italian navy and will stop doing so if rescue is withdrawn speaks volumes about the pitiless logic of neoliberalism.

It is this ideology which subordinates the real needs of human beings for food, shelter, peace and security to the demands of the "markets" for slashed services, ever growing profits for the few which currently calls the tune both in the UK and across the world.

Disaffected public

And at its heart is the core reason for the much discussed but poorly understood chasm now yawning between politicians and an increasingly disaffected public.

All across the mainstream political spectrum politicians have washed their hands of any attempt to tackle the power of big business to hike energy bills, sack workers, deal with the housing crisis and protect living standards and rely on symbolic "watchdogs"—largely toothless—to do the job.

The results of this is seen most dramatically in Scottish Labour which is now a wholly owned creature of the banks and fat cats with the red flag only brought out for special

PHOTO: Craig Maclean



Diverse movement is Yes's greatest strength

harmless occasions as needed. The resulting loss of support, already evident before the indy ref, has turned into a torrent as Labour lined up with the detested Tories to rubbish the optimistic, mass vision of a largely left wing alternative embraced by the Yes campaign.

All indy parties have grown as a result but the SNP staggeringly so and is now predicted to smash Labour's once iron grip at the Westminster polls in May next year.

Such predictions must of course be treated with a degree of caution both regarding the actual result and its political implications.

The greatest strength of the Yes movement is just that—it is a movement and that is a gain which so far has not gone away.

Women for Indy

The ferment of debate around a range of topics, the powers for Holyrood, democratising the media, jobs and justice, building on the work of groups such as Women for Independence and others, must continue.

Perhaps the most important task now facing the thousands who backed the vision of the Yes movement is to strike a bal-

ance between the inevitable pressures of the electoral cycle on the one hand and the need to maintain the unity which was the key achievement of the referendum campaign.

There should be no misunderstanding that if the changes promised by the Westminster parties are to be first maximised and then put to use in the service of changing Scotland then this will need to be the work of a unified and diverse movement.

It was in recognition of this that the recent Scottish Socialist Party conference agreed to explore both the idea of what has been labelled a "Yes alliance" of pro-indy parties SNP, Greens and SSP at the Westminster polls and build the best possible

socialist challenge for Holyrood in 2016.

There is no contradiction for the SSP to both build on its stunning growth in membership since 18 September to strengthen its challenge while working with other forces on the progressive left to win real change.

The referendum campaign gave a taste of the kind of policies and solutions that are possible in the work of building a real people before profit Scotland.

All around us the economic crisis impoverishes millions, war rages and stark warnings on the impending climate crisis grows demanding action both nationally and internationally and it presents a grave challenge to progressives to meet that challenge.



Join the SSP

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by John McAllion, ex-Labour MP and MSP, now an SSP member

IF JIM MURPHY WINS – SCOTTISH LABOUR LOSES

THEY SAY that every picture tells a story. Yet one image from Labour's recent Manchester party conference conceals much more than it reveals.

The image, taken just days after Scotland had rejected independence, shows a triumphant Ed Miliband on stage and basking in a standing ovation from Labour delegates. He is surrounded by his successful Scottish No campaign team, including Alistair Darling, Johann Lamont and Anas Sarwar. Their confident smiles and relaxed demeanour tell the watching world that this is what a winning political operation looks like.

Yet within a calendar month, the wheels had come completely off Labour's Scottish machine.

Firstly, Lamont resigned as Scottish leader blaming London Labour for treating the Scottish party as a "branch office".

Then, Sarwar was forced to resign his deputy leadership to make room for the Blairite MP Jim Murphy and rookie MSP Kezia Dugdale to take over the "poisoned Quich" of leading the Scottish Labour Party.

Wipe-out

Finally, in the wake of opinion polls showing a near Scottish Labour wipe-out in next year's general election, Darling announced he was standing down as an MP and looking to build a career away from elected politics.

None of this was foreseen by the London-based media.

They had expected that what they regarded as a decisive No vote in the referendum would return Scottish politics to the provincial backwaters it usually occupied under Westminster rule.

Scotland, they imagined, would now go back to doing what it did best—sending 40-odd Labour MPs to shore up British Labour's bid to become the next UK government. Instead they were left with a



Labour Party north of the border in apparent meltdown and with opinion polls suggesting that re-energised nationalists rather than House trained Labourites would be spearheading a Scottish assault on Westminster's after the 2015 election.

A sense of betrayal and frustration runs through the British coverage of these unfolding events. Scottish Labour, so recently feted as having saved the union, is now dismissed as a "rock-bottom basket case" by one senior commentator.

Another describes it as "faction ridden" and requiring a leader who possesses an "MA in Advanced Scottish Feuding Studies" to sort out the poisonous hatreds that run through the party.

Johann Lamont is also vilified for aiding and abetting the nationalist enemy by the manner of her departure. One critic even suggested that by blaming London Labour, "she might as well have defected" to the nationalist cause.

What also unites these British critics is the conviction that Jim

Murphy is the "champion who can revive a demoralised and divided party". He is variously described across the London based press as "Labour's best chance", "a gutsy street fighter" and "the big political beast in the...leadership contest". One pundit even suggested that his 100 towns tour of Scotland during the referendum campaign, during which he spoke in public squares using an Irn-Bru crate as a soapbox, had made him into a "martyr to nationalist egg-throwers".

The other candidates for the leadership, MSPs Neil Findlay and Sarah Boyack, remain invisible to British journalists who know little or nothing about Holyrood or Scottish politics.

Murphy's elevation by British commentators to being the saviour of Scottish and UK Labour politics reveals the extent to which they are out of touch with post-referendum politics in Scotland.

Murphy, far from being the answer to Labour's problems north of the border, epitomises everything that is wrong with the

Labour Party in Scotland. He is a political careerist who took advantage of the Labour landslide in 1997 to establish a safe constituency base in what had been till then the safest Tory seat in Scotland. From there, he embarked upon what he hoped would be a glittering Westminster career by climbing on the New Labour bandwagon.

He has held to the New Labour line ever since.

He has staunchly supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan along with the renewal of Trident and anti-terrorism laws.

He is a staunch supporter of Israel's "right to self-defence" against what he describes as "terrorist" attacks from Gaza. He backed foundation hospitals and market reforms in the NHS. He strongly supported means-tested welfare reforms that have targeted the poor and the vulnerable.

Alienated vote

He supported the end of free university education. He backs massive cuts to public spending in the name of deficit reduction. He stands for the kind of politics that have alienated Labour's heartland vote across Scotland.

Throughout his 17 years in Westminster, he has shown little or no interest in Scottish politics. It was only when the prospect of independence threatened business as usual on the green benches of the House of Commons that he abruptly re-discovered his appetite for leading the Scottish Labour Party back from the brink of looming electoral disaster.

His candidacy is Westminster's answer to its difficulties with Scotland. It answers none of the real problems facing a Scotland beset by the politics of austerity. If Murphy wins, Scottish Labour loses.

by Colin Fox, SSP
national co-spokesperson

SSP backs Living Wage campaign

THE SSP Annual Conference in Edinburgh was a great success. There were four times as many people there as last time and it was especially encouraging to see so many enthusiastic and talented new members.

This was obviously our first conference since the referendum and in my keynote speech I pointed to the parallels between the 18 September result and the Mid-Lanarkshire by-election of 1888.

That election, as all serious students of socialist politics will be aware, is remembered only for the candidate who came fourth. No one remembers who won. That was unimportant. The political earthquake that occurred that day was due to the emergence of the first ever candidate from the organised labour movement, one James Keir Hardie.

His candidacy marked the beginning of a new era, as the working class majority ended its links with the Liberal Party and recognised the need for its own political voice. Britain was changed utterly as a consequence.

The 2014 referendum has also changed Scottish politics forever. And you could be forgiven however for thinking after one month that the Yes side had won as more than 60,000 people have joined the three independence parties.

Miliband 'betrayal'

But it is the huge problems at the heart of the Scottish Labour Party in particular that have dominated political conversations. First Johann Lamont dramatically resigned as leader bitterly accusing Ed Miliband of betrayal and of treating Scotland like his 'branch office'.

Then a series of opinion polls suggested that Labour could lose virtually all its Westminster seats here in what threatens to be its worst result in 50 years. And as if that was not bad



SIDING WITH WORKERS: conference votes to campaign for a living wage
PHOTO: Craig Maclean

enough the East Renfrewshire MP and arch-Blairite Jim Murphy has now emerged as the likely heir apparent and the answer to Scottish Labour's many 'challenges'!

Murphy is no Keir Hardie to be sure, his election will not be greeted by organised labour or the wider working class. It signifies that Labour will continue to try to attack the SNP from the right.

This fact illustrates that Labour's biggest crisis is that it does not know what it stands for anymore. Whilst both parties offer more or less identical neo-liberal economic policies the SNP backs some left of centre social policies.

Next year's General Election looks set to be dominated by two issues above all, the fall in living standards of working people on the one hand and the rise of UKIP on the other. Labour has nothing to offer either debate. They favour further austerity, massive cuts in

public spending and in the living standards of the working class majority and they pander to UKIP on immigration.

This is all light years removed from the magnificent independence campaign these past two years that reminded SSP members of the need for a mass party, with a clear and widely understood socialist programme and an unshakeable orientation towards the working class majority.

Conference congratulated the party leadership for playing such a prominent role in Yes Scotland and it also decided our campaign priorities for the year ahead. These will include furthering our goal of an independent socialist Scotland, counteracting the pernicious influence of UKIP and backing the Campaign for a Living Wage.

With wages for working people having fallen by £50 per week since 2008 in real terms [Source; TUC] this latter campaign is cru-

cially important. Some 22 per cent of employees are now earning below the living wage of £7.69/hour in Scotland with bar staff, shop assistants and care workers the worst affected.

A report by consultants KPMG found that 43 per cent of all part time staff earn below the living wage. This is the type of campaign the SSP intends to pursue, with our demand for a Scottish minimum wage of £10 an hour, to build upon what we achieved these past two years. Our local activists also aim to raise the political consciousness of working people about socialism and the nature of the class struggle in Scotland today. And as I said to Conference my message to the people of Scotland remains clear:

'If you are a socialist you should join a socialist party. Don't build illusions in other ones! You are not furthering the socialist cause by doing so, you are hindering it both in the short term and long term.'

Struggle

Those who talked of 'the post-SSP political landscape' in Scotland back in 2012 look foolish today. The SSP is more necessary than ever. We marry the struggle for self-determination with the equally important struggle to emancipate working class people from the yoke of free market capitalism.

That's the unique dual role the Scottish Socialist Party plays today. We aim to transform Scotland from a capitalist country run by a wealthy elite into a socialist republic run for the benefit of all where self-determination, empowerment, equality and democracy reign supreme. And we will.

by *Richie Venton*,
SSP national workplace
organiser

ON 1 July 2014 I wrote an article for the *Voice*—“Ructions after the Referendum”—which included the statement: “The exposé of Labour as open collaborators with the avowed Tory enemy of workers has added immensely to the process of workers unshackling themselves from their old Labour loyalties.”

Within weeks of the referendum result absolute ructions have erupted in Labour, with an intense squeeze on them from the hundreds of thousands of trade unionists who fund their party.

The Labour Party was founded 120 years ago by pioneering socialists and trade unionists who had seen through the false promises and capitalist ideology of the Liberals.

They sought to build a mass party of the working class, a political wing of the trade union movement.

Labour's record

But that was then! History has turned full circle. Workers entered the 21st century with no mass party to represent and voice their aims, interests and aspirations.

Labour's attachment to the UK state, displayed during the referendum, is an expression of its deeper ideological devotion to capitalism. Since at least the 1990s,

Labour has transformed into an openly capitalist party, the New Tories.

That was harshly exposed under the spotlight of Labour being in government from 1997-2010. Thirteen years in

UNIONS MUST BREAK FROM LABOUR TORIES:

Stop funding arsonists to torch your home!

which Labour retained the most vicious anti-trade union laws in the whole of Europe; announced the slashing of 100,000 civil service jobs; scrapped the 10p tax rate for the lowest paid; implemented rampant privatisation; raided workers' pensions; allowed the worst levels of inequality since 1886, according to Oxfam; and dragged us into the blood-soaked killing fields of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Not to mention Gordon Brown's boasts of having ended the capitalist cycle of 'boom and bust' being smashed to smithereens by the bankers' crisis of 2008.

Back in January 1999 the SSP launched the 'Make the Break' campaign, appealing to trade unions to end their funding of Labour's New Tories, instead demanding a democratic choice of pro-trade union parties that workers could help fund through their union fees—on top of what individual workers could do by

joining the SSP to pursue the goals long since abandoned by Labour.

Some unions did in subsequent years, but now the time is rotten ripe to 'Make the Break' and help build a mass, working class socialist party. Immeasurably more so than in 1999, especially after the mass politicisation of working class people that the referendum debate produced.

Cash for millionaires

Yet many trade union leaderships persist with Labour affiliation and funding of their own worst enemies. It might be only a few pence a month that each union member gives to Labour (usually without knowing it!) if they're in one of the affiliated unions. But over a period it adds up to £millions of members' hard-earned money going to an outfit that couldn't give a toss about low pay, inequality, workplace victimisation or the shackles on workplace

rights imposed by successive Tory and Labour governments.

Given their track record, it's obscene to note the level of trade union funding since 2001: Unite has given Labour £41.4million since then; Unison £19.6million; GMB £15.7million; Usdaw £12.29million; CWU £7.6million. And in 2013, the trade unions accounted for 77 per cent of the total funding enjoyed by Labour.

It's time to end this madness.

Thousands of workers in Labour-affiliated unions are in revolt, rightly furious at the treacherous role of Labour in blocking Scottish democracy, the right to rule our own country. And at bottom this is a rebellion against the continued anti-working class policies of capitalist austerity on offer from Labour.

Hundreds in each of several unions have furiously—but mistakenly—resigned from their union in disgust at being told to vote No by a leadership



MILLIONS FOR A PARTY SUPPORTING MILLIONAIRES! many union leaderships continue to fund their own worst enemies PHOTO: Craig Maclean

that failed to hold democratic debates or votes amongst members first. That includes Usdaw, GMB, CWU. Mistakenly because in most cases that leaves them with no alternative union that is recognised by their employer, leaving workers defenceless in the face of exploitation or victimisation.

Hundreds have taken the much more constructive route of staying in the union but withdrawing payment of the political levy to Labour, by filling in exemption forms. And vowing to fight for democracy in their own union.

To illustrate the scale of this growing force determined to punish Labour, almost half my own Usdaw branch members have completed these forms in the past few weeks—with more to come! And that includes many who voted No, but feel abandoned and betrayed by Labour.

But it's important to avoid the pitfall of believing that "the unions should stay away from politics". That is impossible. Workers' conditions, incomes and rights are determined by political decisions.

Anti-union laws have helped reduce wages to their lowest share of national wealth in 60 years.

Life is political

The pathetic level of the minimum wage—which has become the norm rather than the minimum—needs to be challenged politically.

Not with Labour's recent insulting promise of £8 by 2020—which would barely match inflation—but with the demand of the Scottish Socialist Party for a £10 minimum here and now.

Political decisions on public services, privatisation, fracking, Corporation Tax levels and a multitude of other issues deeply affect our daily lives. Workers need an organised socialist voice

and vehicle. And as hundreds of thousands demonstrated by their participation during the referendum, we should never leave those decisions to an elite, the 'political class' of career politicians, most of whom have never done a day's work outside the machinery of their own party and parliament.

We need to demand union members' meetings and decision-making Scottish conferences, where as well as pursuing the fight for measures to tackle poverty, inequality and the dictatorship of capital, we can democratically decide which political parties members' fees can contribute to.

That would assist workers in choosing to help construct a mass socialist party that stands up, unashamedly, for the working class.

When contender for Scottish Labour leader, Jim Murphy, talks of

"representing both the prosperous and the poor", he is repeating the nauseous, dishonest claptrap of Blairite New Labour. In reality they represent 'the prosperous', at the expense of 'the poor'.

At their recent Labour Gala Dinner, these worthies forked out £200 each in the city where people rely on food banks for handouts to avoid literal starvation.

They have countered the Tory Coalition's £25billion in cuts over two years with their own cuts over three years—of £27billion!

Party of principles

Workers and their unions don't have to imprison themselves with a choice of two factions of Thatcherism.

They should stop funding their Labour enemy, demand democratic choices and membership control of their unions' political funds—and join the Scottish Socialist Party in pursuit of the democratic socialist aims of the labour movement pioneers.

by Gerry McCartney and Wendy Macdonald

Why the SSP backs a 'Citizen's Income'

AT ITS annual conference in Edinburgh last month the SSP decided to campaign for the introduction of a Citizen's Income (CI) and to do the necessary background research on the right value of the CI and the best way of administering it.

What is a Citizen's Income?

A CI is a guaranteed income paid by government to all citizens which would replace most existing benefits and would be free from means testing. It would be set at a level for adults above the poverty line and a lower level would be paid for children, normally to the mother.

For those in work, it would form part of wages and result in them paying more tax as a result. There may be exceptions to the replacement of current benefits with a Citizen's Income such as housing benefit where direct costs are absorbed as they are variable across the country or some specific disability benefits due to particularly high needs of individuals.

Eradicate poverty

There are not many policy proposals that can claim that they would eradicate poverty at a stroke, but CI is one that legitimately can. Because CI would provide sufficient income for everyone in society, young and old, in work or not and without



means testing or strings, poverty would disappear overnight. As with the other pillars of universal public services such as the NHS, the CI would become a source of pride for the population and would send a strong signal that everyone in society is valued no matter their personal circumstances.

The Labour/Liberal/Tory attacks on the welfare state over the last 30 years have meant privatisation, cuts, stigmatisation and the introduction of numerous conditions on social security provision.

Much of the universal nature of benefits has been eradicated

leaving the door open to attacks on recipients and the outrageous demonisation we see daily across the press. Those on benefits are restricted in terms of the work and volunteering they can do for fear of having their income removed.

The government revels in the Damocles sword of sanctions, deliberately threatening and stressing recipients. How can people flourish in such an environment?

With a CI, the entire situation would be reversed. People would have the financial freedom to volunteer, care for relatives or children, learn, or be artistically or musically creative. There would be the freedom to take work, and only when employers pay sufficiently to make it financially worthwhile thus driving up wages, or not take work, without the fear of sanction. Workers would be able to go on strike since CI forms an automatic strike pay. In essence, CI would provide everyone in society the freedom to flourish, protected from the economic conscription of capitalism.

All of the problems with the welfare 'reforms' would be resolved. No more means testing or sanctions, instead universal provision valued and supported

across the population as a right of being a citizen.

The capitalist parties would balk at the idea of a CI at the kind of level to eradicate poverty. Why? Well, CI would remove the reserve army of labour that drives down wages. It would take away the very existence of group in society that could be blamed for all of the country's ills. And to pay for it we would need to massively redistribute the income and wealth of the country. So the CI isn't going to be introduced without a fight.

Within workplaces the case rests on it driving up wages, since employers will have to pay more than the CI in order to compensate workers sufficiently to make it worth their while. Furthermore, striking workers would have a huge amount more economic power since employers will not be able to starve them back to work.

Stable income

Amongst those out of work, whether because they are unemployed, sick or disabled, students or retired, the CI would take away the uncertainties and threats from current welfare provision and ensure a stable source of income and hugely popular policy as a result. Even for those in well paid jobs and who own small businesses there is a case. By providing a stable background income, it would help those starting up small businesses during the initial period. By ridding society of poverty and reducing inequality, it would benefit all in society by reducing all the demands on public spending from poor health and high crime rates which result from unequal societies.

The fiercest opponents of the CI will be those with most to lose—the rich, powerful and wealthy—the natural opponents of the SSP! We will be working up a much more detailed set of briefings for party members in the months to come.

• If you want to be involved, email Gerry McCartney at oldgeriatrix@hotmail.com

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by Bill Newman

TTIP: a threat to democracy

THE INNOCENT-sounding US-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is currently being prepared behind closed doors by overpaid corporate lawyers for passage through the European Union.

In fact, it is far from as innocent as it sounds and is far removed from the normal innocuous trade agreement which it purports to be. In reality, it will lead to a radical reduction in employee rights and an empowerment of the interests of big business above those of governments throughout the EU.

Through a process called “regulatory harmonisation”, big business would be able to sue governments for imposing standards or regulations which would restrict their operations and profits. In practice, this would mean that any health and safety regulations, any laws protecting workers’ rights and any protected publicly owned bodies could be nullified by private companies.

NHS not safe

During the independence referendum, it was claimed that though the NHS in England was being privatised, at least the Scottish NHS was safe in public hands.

Under TTIP regulations this would not be true, as private enterprises would be able to challenge public investment in any publicly-owned bodies, including the NHS, and compete for any investment without having to abide by any of the protective legislation we have in place. Not only would this make the protection and extension of the public sector impossible, but it would prevent governments doing anything about it!

The mechanism for achieving this and over-ruling any government intervention is an “arbitration” device called Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).

This device is already in operation in many so-called trade/investor agreements throughout the world whereby decision are made in secret, off-shore, usually by a panel of corporate lawyers to determine if there is any loss of revenue suffered by private investors through legitimate state restrictions. The opening paragraph of an article on ISDS in the free-market oriented, right-wing journal *The Economist*, hardly a friend of socialists, is worth quoting:

“If you wanted to convince the public that international trade agreements are a way to let international companies get rich at the expense of ordinary people, this is what you would do: give foreign firms a special right to apply to a secretive tribunal of highly paid corporate lawyers for compensation whenever a government passes a law to, say, discourage smoking, protect the environment or prevent a nuclear catastrophe.

“Yet that is precisely what thousands of trade and investment treaties over the past half century have done, through a process known as ‘investor state dispute settlement’”.

And that is precisely what TTIP intends to incorporate in its legislation. Lest it be felt that this is unduly alarmist here is what three ISDS agreements are determining.

Occidental, the oil giant, is suing Ecuador, through ISDS, for \$2.3billion over its perfectly legal termination of Occidental’s oil concession contract; Vattenfall, a Swedish company, is suing Germany for \$4.7billion for loss of earnings over the closure of two nuclear plants which it operated; and Philip Morris are demanding a huge sum for loss of earnings as the Australian Government has determined that cigarettes must be sold in plain packets.

No wonder Brazil, for example, has refused

to have anything to do with ISDS agreements and South Africa is trying to disentangle itself from such agreements.

Yet, that is what is being proposed under the US-EU TTIP proposal, not surprisingly with the enthusiastic support of Conservative ministers. Disappointingly, with some notable exceptions, the Westminster opposition and even our SNP government has been remarkably quiet on this proposed massive erosion of our public liberties.

The appalling nature of TTIP and its particularly nasty ISDS appendage is still little understood at large and the support of Barack Obama and the European Commission makes its advance towards legislation more certain, but public pressure can still halt, or at least modify its advance.

The European TUC has set out its minimum requirements for change, namely the removal of ISDS, protection for public services and standards equivalent to ILO conventions (to which, incidentally, the USA has not signed up to). In the UK, Unite the trade union has been particularly vocal in its opposition and its Glasgow Retired Members’ Branch, for example, has been out on the streets of Glasgow campaigning particularly to get the NHS excluded from TTIP.

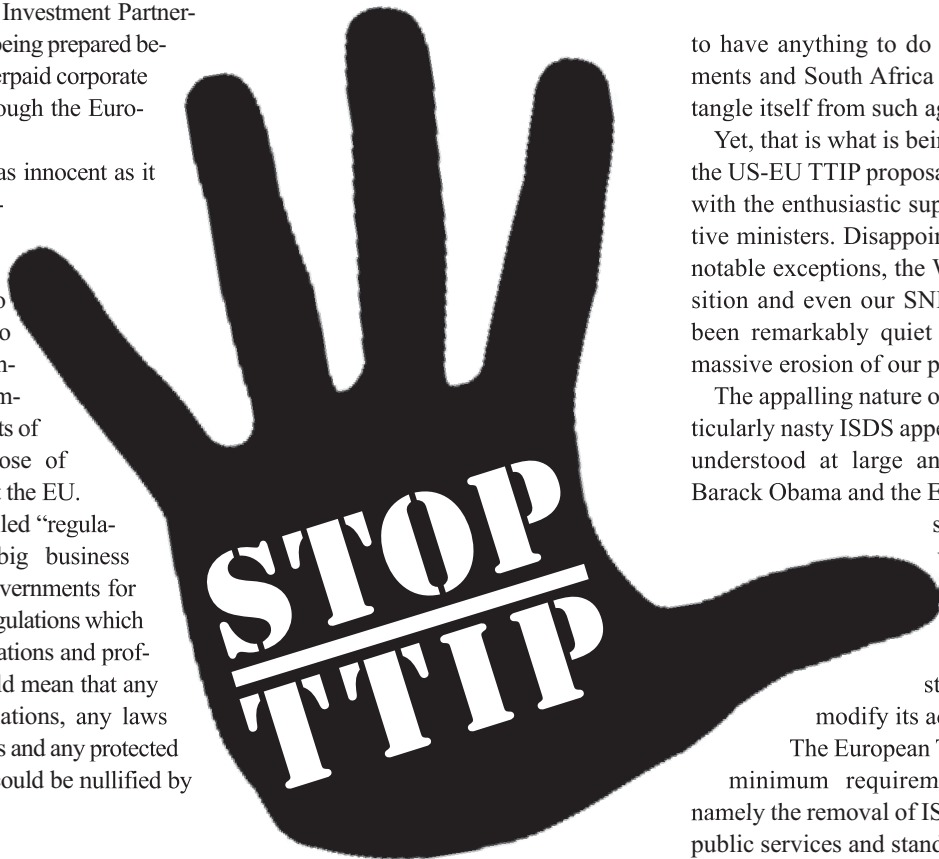
Dangers

Public pressure must be amplified and more efforts made to make our MEPs, in particular, aware of the dangers of TTIP, for the European Parliament still has the power to vote against TTIP’s implementation.

MPs and MEPs must also be lobbied and civic bodies, including trade unions and churches, must be made aware of the dangers facing us.

Public opposition is beginning to have an impact and Jean Claude Juncker, the incoming President of the European Commission, who has recently indicated that ISDS is not necessarily an integral part of TTIP.

Finally, campaigning bodies such as StopTTIP, 38degrees and War on Want are running vigorous campaigns and the more who join with them, the more chances of success in stopping this wicked legislation there is!



IT'S NOT the winning that's important, it's the taking part. This might be a good summation of the government's overview of Britain's war in Afghanistan. At least they have the good grace not to dress any of this up as a victory.

If they did, the backlash from the British people would be considerable. Yet claims are made that much has been achieved. In this light it is perhaps worthwhile reminding ourselves of the original objectives behind this adventure.

To defeat the Taliban and bring peace to a war shattered country. To strike a blow against international terrorism much of which, it was claimed originated in Afghanistan. To rebuild the infrastructure of the country after a generation of conflict which identified Afghanistan as the poorest and most underdeveloped country in the world. To establish democracy in a country ruled in turn by 'marxist fanatics' and medieval Islamic barbarians.

As Britain leaves what does it leave behind? According to most reports the Taliban are as strong as ever and ready to resume military operations while the underlying civil war between the Taliban and Northern Alliance continues.

Corruption

The threat of international terrorism arising from the conflict is far greater now than at the start. The rebuilding of the country has been patchy to say the least when set against the scores of billions of dollars spent while huge amounts have been lost in a massive black hole of corruption.

As for democracy that aim was abandoned a long time ago. Afghanistan has been governed by a succession of weak, dependent, corrupt governments which openly rig elections and buy votes and violently suppress all opposition. The reality is that western intervention has been a disaster exacerbating an already serious conflict and

As Britain pulls out of Afghanistan, what has it left behind?

asks Bill Bonnar



leaving behind a mess. After the collapse of the Soviet backed government the country was plunged into a civil war between two reactionary groupings—the Northern Alliance in the North and the Taliban in the South. These in turn were collections of tribal, regional and religious groupings each fighting for their own interests.

However, despite the differences the overall aim is the same. The creation of a medieval style Islamic state in which women, in particular, are consigned to the status of mere property of men. In fact, it was the policies on the liberation of women under the previous Karmal/Najibula regime which fuelled much of the western backed 'war of liberation' against this government.

The west supported the North-

ern Alliance because they were a bit less ideological and a lot more corrupt than the Taliban and therefore more likely to accommodate western interests. During the period of the soviet intervention they supported the Taliban and groups like Al Qaeda and here is the crux of the matter.

Western policy towards Afghanistan has never been about helping the people of that country, liberating women or spreading democracy. It has always been about defending western interests and bringing Afghanistan under western control.

Thirteen years after the initial intervention this strategy is in tatters leaving a state which has to all purposes collapsed a resumption of the civil war and a shattered economy. In fact western strategy now is about accommo-

dating the Taliban and brokering a peace between them and the Afghan Government (Northern Alliance) as the best way to ensure stability and protect western interests. The withdrawal of American and British troops is central to this strategy which is why they are being withdrawn although American air bases and rapid deployment forces based outside the country will remain.

When the pro-socialist government of Barbrak Karmal came to power in 1979 it had a clear view as to the road down which Afghanistan should travel. The aim was that Afghanistan would become a modern, secular republic with the ultimate aim of building a viable democracy.

There would be an ambitious programme of economic and social development aimed at improving the lives of a poverty stricken population. At the centre of this would be the transformation of the status of and welfare of women.

Reactionary revolt

These lofty aims crumbled in the face of reactionary religious and tribal revolt supported by the west and a soviet intervention which turned the entire country into a war zone. Despite this experience these aims are still fundamental if Afghanistan is to have any future.

The country can have no viable future under the Northern Alliance or the Taliban or any combination of the two. These are movements based of regional and tribal interests and driven by a medieval ideology. Nor can it be based on the cynical accommodation of western interests.

The rebuilding of Afghanistan must be based on promoting the interests of the people of that country, particularly women, through the creation of a modern, progressive and secular government. That this appears far away does not alter the fact. The alternative is a continuation of war, destruction and the final collapse of the country.

CATALAN LEFT CALLS ON SPANISH STATE TO DROP OPPOSITION TO INDY REFERENDUM

by Voice Reporter

AS THE Voice went to press, Catalans were due to vote in the 9 November consultative referendum on independence in the teeth of Spanish opposition.

A broad left platform has called on Madrid to reverse its opposition to the process.

The Catalan platform 'Left for Yes-Yes', has called on the Spanish government of Mariano Rajoy to reverse its opposition to sanctioning a non-binding consultation in Catalonia on the future of the region. The platform is called Left for Yes-Yes in reference to the two-part question designed for the consultation.

This asks:

1. Do you want Catalonia to become a state?
2. If so, do you want that state to be independent?

The platform Left for Yes-Yes groups together a wide range of left organisations who support an independent Catalonia, and has a 16-point platform summarising its positions in support of 'Democracy, Freedom and Social Justice'.



YOU YES-YES YET? the Spanish Constitutional Court has declared the Catalan indyref 'illegal'

COUNTDOWN TO THE CATALAN CRISIS: key dates

1931: A Catalan Republic is proclaimed more than 200 years after the King of Spain had invaded Barcelona to suppress the independence of Catalonia destroy the country and impose an absolutist monarchy. Negotiations with the Spanish Republic lead to extensive under the leadership of Eskerra Republicana—the Republican Left.

1936: General Franco launches a fascist insurrection, igniting the Spanish Civil War. At the heart of his programme is the abolition of Catalan and Basque autonomy.

1939: Franco's forces finally capture Barcelona, paving the way for the collapse of Republican resistance across Spain. During the 36-year reign of fascism, Catalan autonomy is smashed and the language driven underground.

1975: Death of Franco leads to the start of the restoration of democratic rights.

1977: A new Spanish constitution is

drawn up which recognises the existence of "regional communities" but proclaims the Spanish as state as "indivisible".

1979: A Catalan Statute of Autonomy is agreed, which allows for a devolved parliament while prohibiting any move towards independence.

1980: Moderate centre-right nationalist party, Convergence and Union (Convergencia) becomes the ruling party in the new Catalan government.

2003: Convergence and Union ousted after 23 years in power, to be replaced by a coalition of the Socialists, the Republican Left and the Greens.

2005: Catalan Parliament approves, with the support of 120 MPs out of 135, a proposal to reform the 1979 Statute of Autonomy that for the first time recognises Catalonia as a nation.

2006: The new Statute of Autonomy is agreed by both chambers of the Spanish

Parliament and endorsed by a referendum of the Catalan people.

The right wing Peoples Party—now the governing party in Madrid—launches a legal action against the decision

2009: The town of Arenys de Munt holds a consultative referendum which resoundingly supports the right of Catalonia to self-determination. Over the next year, 54 other towns follow suit.

2010: After four years of deliberation, the Spanish Constitutional Court rules in favour of the Peoples Party. It rewrites and reinterprets 41 articles of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy, seriously curbing the powers of the Catalan Government and refusing to recognise Catalonia as a nation.

2012: Following two years of escalating support for Catalan independence, the moderate Convergencia—now back in

Government come out in favour of a referendum and form a coalition with the Republican Left party, which emerges hugely strengthened in the November general election. Both parties are committed to a referendum

2013: The Catalan Parliament adopts the Sovereignty Declaration, which asserts that Catalonia is a sovereign nation with the right to decide its own future.

2014: The Spanish Constitutional Court rules that the independence referendum supported by the Catalan Parliament is illegal. The decision is backed by the governing Peoples Party and the opposition Socialist Party in Madrid. A mass demonstration of 1.8 million people marches through Barcelona on Catalan's National Day, 11 September. Five days later, the Catalan Parliament votes, by a majority of four to one to go ahead with a non-binding referendum on 9 November. This too has been declared illegal by the Spanish Constitutional Court.

for Socialism, Independence
and Internationalism

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COMRADES COME RALLY: guest speakers at the recent SSP conference (left to right), the Scottish Green Party's Maggie Chapman, Jonathon Shafi from the Radical Indy Campaign and former Labour For Indy leader Allan Grogan, who joined the SSP last month. Below right, SSP national co-spokesperson Colin Fox

PHOTOS: Craig Maclean



Upbeat SSP conference charts way ahead

by Voice Reporter

THE FIRST post-referendum conference of the Scottish Socialist Party which met last month in Edinburgh was an inspirational event. Reflecting the flood of new members

which the SSP, like the other pro-Yes parties, has experienced, the event was some four times larger than its counterpart in 2013 with many of those present newly joined members.

It was particularly encouraging to see a

number of those new members participating and speaking with confidence.

A range of decisions were taken including moves to reconstitute the SSP women's network, support for a citizen's income and a

wide-ranging debate on issues such as the idea of a Yes alliance at the general election and how the left can co-operate in the period ahead. One highlight was the speech by former Labour for Independence leader

Allan Grogan who told the conference why he had joined the SSP.

Conference also heard from the Radical Independence Campaign's Jonathon Shafi, and Maggie Chapman from the Scottish Green Party.