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Scottish Socialist Voice

From Spain to Scotland..



PHOTO: Alan Ferguson

ALL OUT AGAINST AUSTERITY

**SCOTLAND
UNITED
AGAINST
AUSTERITY**

STUC Demo

**George Sq, Glasgow
Sat 20 June**

PHOTO: Alan Ferguson



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SSP CONFERENCE

by Colin Fox, SSP
national co-spokesperson

THE SSP Annual Conference in Edinburgh last weekend provided a timely opportunity for members to reflect on the outcome of the General Election. Representatives from 30 branches across Scotland gathered to debate a range of motions and to lay out the SSP's strategy for the year ahead.

Many speakers mentioned the bittersweet outcome of the election where celebrations of Labour's resounding defeat in Scotland were marred by the re-election of the Tories. The main item under discussion at Conference was an Executive Committee proposal to consider an electoral alliance for the 2016 Holyrood elections together with other socialists in the incipient Scottish Left Project.

The EC Statement made clear that the party had delayed a decision on this proposal until after our General Election campaign. The statement stressed there was nothing unusual in such tactical considerations.

Indeed, the SSP had been approached for example by leading members of the Scottish Green Party ahead of the European Elections last year to support a 'Red/Green Alliance' for that contest. And regular readers of this newspaper will be aware, the SSP proposed all three parties in the Yes Scotland coalition should stand joint candidates for the 2015 Westminster elections to maximise the strength and breadth of the independence movement.

Statement

As it happens, neither of these two proposals came to fruition because the Greens and the SNP backed out. But both were propositions the SSP favoured.

The EC Statement was overwhelmingly supported by Conference. And it was made clear this initiative did not infer any diminution in the SSP's identity. We remain committed to building the SSP and fully understand the vital role political parties must play.

SSP conference sets out party strategy for the year ahead



The SSP will continue to campaign for a £10-an-hour living wage, against austerity, for an independent socialist Scotland, against Trident and conduct all our other work as the SSP.

SSP national representatives will meet with their counterparts in the Scottish Left Project in the next few days to discuss how this electoral alliance plan can be progressed. And SSP members will be consulted via the EC, the National Council and local branches at each stage in the negotiating process. Following that discussion Conference heard from Myrto Tsakatiki of Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left in Greece. She addressed conference as one of our guest speakers and brought greetings from Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.

This was the first time an SSP Conference had received the official well wishes of a national Government. Speaking about the ongoing debt crisis in Greece she insisted: "Third way social democracy is in crisis internationally as it puts the greed of the few ahead of the needs of the many.

"And I am proud," she added "that Syriza stands alongside the Scottish Socialist Party and Podemos and others to insist people's needs come before profits."

She received a standing ovation after pointing out the struggles of the labour movement internationally should provide inspiration and courage to working class people everywhere and we must all take heart from the power and strength of our political solidarity.

Jonathon Shafi of the Scottish Left Project, the other guest speaker, congratulated the SSP for helping to push the independence referendum debate to the left and away from what he called "brute nationalism". He said he very much looked forward to working with the SSP in building a successful united left alliance for Holyrood in 2016 and sharing the many successes there was to come.

New ideas

After lunch, the conference workshops focused on effective campaigning, the history of the SSP and party building which all produced many excellent new ideas for the incoming party Executive to work on.

Conference then elected SSP national office bearers for the coming year; Colin Fox and Sandra Webster were re-elected as joint national spokespersons. Bill Bonnar was elected as National Secretary, Wendy Macdonald and Andrew Kinnell as National co-

chairs, Jim McVicar as National Treasurer, Richie Venton as national trade union organiser, Ken Ferguson as Media Manager, Neil Scott as social media co-ordinator and Scott Macdonald as Membership Secretary.

Fourteen members were also elected to serve on the EC for the coming year—seven male: Calum Martin [Edinburgh South], Connor Beaton [Dundee], Colin Turbett [Ayrshire], Liam McLaughlan [Glasgow], Paolo Caserta [Edinburgh North], Allan Grogan [Dundee] and John Davidson [Glasgow]; and seven female: Natalie Reid [Edinburgh North], Christine McVicar [East Kilbride], Katie Bonnar [Glasgow], Jenni Gunn [Stirling], Liz Shaw [Ayrshire], Helen Meldrum [Dundee] and Frances Curran [Glasgow].

The party also expressed its sincere thanks to Kevin McVey who was standing down as National Secretary after many years diligent service. Kevin is a long-standing and much respected member who, as it happened, took ill during Conference and was rushed to hospital.

Thankfully, his condition was not serious and he was allowed home after tests. All SSP members will want to join with me in wishing him a full and speedy recovery.

From Spain to Scotland, the power of money must be tamed

by Ken Ferguson

AS THE Tories unveil their assault on vital services, democratic rights and trade unions amidst the establishment pomp of the Queen's speech, the need for resistance to this no-mandate government grows ever more urgent.

And the sweeping left gains in Spain's regional elections by Podemos and related forces following the election of Syriza—now in the very crucible of struggle between people and profit—earlier this year, is surely clear evidence of the fact that the unfettered power of money can and must be challenged.

Here in Scotland, despite the SNP Westminster landslide, we face a growing assault from a government rejected by Scottish voters but determined to impose its neoliberal will on behalf of the bankers and speculators at the expense of workers, communities and benefit claimants.

Sweeping attacks

In this context, the newly elected SNP MPs will face an early test if they are to face down and help defeat the sweeping attacks now on the agenda from the class war Tories. Without diminishing their achievement, the hard truth is that they cannot defeat the assault simply in the division lobbies of the House of Commons.

During the long night of Thatcherism when Scottish industry was destroyed, unions shackled and social destruction imposed, Labour had a dominant number of Scottish MPs, failed to

even blunt the Tory attacks and earned the derisory title of the “feeble fifty”.

This ‘parliamentary only’ opposition approach was cruelly exposed when it failed to stop the detested Poll Tax which was then swept away in the tide of a mass non-payment campaign which culminated not only with its defeat but also the downfall of Thatcher herself.

With the decision—backed by the unholy three-party Better Together ‘No’ alliance—to stay within the UK, the people of Scotland were delivered into the hands of a Tory minority government imposed by the UK electorate irrespective of how they voted. And so it has proved, and the choice now posed to all those opposing the appalling assaults planned by Cameron and co is simply this—fight or flight?

If opposition is to stand any chance of victory, it will have to spread well beyond the hemicycle of Holyrood or the green benches of Westminster to the streets, workplaces, communities and housing schemes of Scotland and encompass demonstrations, lobbies, occupations, strikes and other tactics of peaceful civil disobedience.

Such action should not be seen as opposed to the work of MPs, MSPs and councillors but as intertwined with their opposition to construct a united movement which can harness the tide of anger, seen at the recent election, to ensure that the plans of the Tory axe persons are stopped in their tracks. An early opportunity



MYRTO TSAKATIKI: of Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left in Greece

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

to build such a movement is the STUC's Scotland United Against Austerity demonstration on 20 June in Glasgow, and this needs to be the opening shot in a determined drive to reject the entirely false idea that misery and cuts are needed to ‘balance the books’, rather than a direct transfer of vast wealth from the majority to the Bullingdon Club-style elite.

It has to be underlined that 20 June must be the start of the opposition and not just a token event.

Build on euphoria

The Scottish Socialist Party—which played a significant role in building the development of a growing left movement during the indyref campaign and in the period since—will be working with other campaigners to ensure that just such a movement is built and that the euphoria around the demise of the Westminster parties at the election is built on.

In particular, the left needs to go beyond the austerity-lite on offer from the SNP, and pose a set

of ideas that go beyond defending inadequate jobs and services towards a society transformed in the interests of the majority.

Such an approach would scrap anti-trade union laws, raise pay with an immediate £10-an-hour minimum wage, a massive social housebuilding programme and public ownership of key industries.

Fashioning both such a programme and movement which can deliver it has been at the heart of the SSP's call for a common programme of the left. It will be hard and difficult work but the decision of the SSP conference to work with others on the left to win such an advance including socialist representation in Holyrood is an important step towards it.

For the near 40 years since the Thatcher counter-revolution, the left has been largely on the defensive, and for the sake of both people and planet, this has to end and the power of money to impose misery across Scotland and the planet broken.

Police Scotland's credibility undermined in armed cops affair

IN A LIBERAL democracy, it's ultimately elected politicians who are charged with holding senior public servants to account. Scotland's chief constable is one such public servant and many wonder why, given the levels of scrutiny that exist, holding him to account has proved so challenging.

Local authorities are the first layer of the checks and balances, with councils having a variety of committee structures to scrutinise the local commander. However, whilst not wishing to disparage former council colleagues, thus far at least, such scrutiny as has taken place has failed to bother the police who continue with their centralist plans regardless.

Then there's the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), a collection of paid officials and appointees, some of whom are past or present local authority councillors. The SPA is finally getting its act together having initially been missing in action on the issues of stop and search and armed policing.

Constant controversy

Finally, there's the Parliament's Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, Members uniquely drawn from the four main parties, the Justice, Local Government and Equal Opportunities Committees.

From day one when the chief constable announced he'd dispense with several thousand police support staff to, only a matter of minutes later, retract the comment, the police have been mired in almost constant controversy and the fault for that lies squarely at the door of the man paid a quarter of a million pounds annually to run it, the chief constable.

During one evidence session at the Parliament the chief constable advised the Committee that his officers were doing a 'fabulous job'. I asked him if he was doing a fab-

The appearance of armed police on Scotland's streets was first spotlighted in a *Voice* article by **John Finnie MSP** last year. Here, he reports on where we stand now...



ulous job and he replied that it was for others to decide.

I'm told by the police that my constituents in Lochinver face the same threat level as those in Leith and that means having armed officers, except of course that there are no armed officers in Lochinver. In recent weeks I have asked whether, 'in the interests of openness and transparency' the SPA could make available to the Police Sub Committee all the versions of its report into the public impact of Police Scotland's Firearms Standing Authority, overtly armed officers to you and me.

The SPA said they'd considered my request then "concluded that to release multiple early drafts would prejudice substantially, or be likely to prejudice substantially, the effective conduct of its public affairs", no surprises there then. I asked for release of the various versions of that important report for a very good reason. I know Police Scotland were unhappy with the initial report and 'demanded changes' so I was, and remain, keen to establish to what extent their intervention changed the final version.

The SPA have been keen to assure me they 'have set a very high level of public transparency for this armed policing work by publishing not only our inquiry report, but also an independent analysis

of evidence gathered, an independent academic study, and an independent public attitude survey,' so my formal Freedom of Information request that the versions of the report be released will see if that's really the case.

I know that the SPA has already instructed the company which undertook their survey not to release all the information gained.

The SPA has been rattled by the justified public criticism it has received over its failure to scrutinise Police Scotland. Now, it has placed great store in what they see as the mechanism to prevent a repetition of that bad press, Police Scotland's 'Communications and Engagement Strategy.'

The strategy means that Police Scotland will advise the Police Authority in advance of any proposed changes likely to be of significant public interest. The SPA say better engagement 'may ... build community confidence and trust.' I think their cautious use of the word 'may' is wise because this process has a fundamental flaw as it's Police Scotland that decides what's 'significant.' We already know that armed officers on our streets and blanket stop and search in some areas weren't considered 'significant' issues at all by the chief constable.

Now, Police Scotland announced on 1 October 2014 that

it would no longer send Armed Response Vehicle officers, who carry sidearms and Tasers, to routine calls and incidents. However, once again, it was Inverness where questions were raised about an armed officer walking through a busy railway station simply because he was giving someone a lift and I know that's not an isolated issue.

Clearly, the police have got themselves in a pickle. Unwilling to climb down and lock the guns back in the boots of the cars where they should be, they are leaving it to officers' individual judgement whether to get out their vehicle to help with routine incidents or not.

Botched report

The SPA will have to work hard at raising its credibility and the botched armed police report hasn't helped, however, if you are looking for an honest broker, step forward Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, (HMIC) Derrick Penman, himself a former chief officer. Mr Penman's successive reports on stop and search and armed policing have laid out the pros and cons of each practice, analysed their application and highlighted the shortcomings including the need for meaningful engagement with the public, sound work with a clear evidential base with no unwillingness to criticise constructively.

Scotland has over 17,000 officers, a very small percentage of whom are armed, the very large percentage of whom do great work in our communities.

Despite the outcome of the General Election, Scotland will remain a liberal democracy, its parliamentarians will make the laws, its courts will interpret the laws and its police service will act as public servants and be scrutinised accordingly.

by David Eyre

FOR THE last few months, I've been helping the Real Co-op campaign try to end the exclusive link between the Labour Party and the Co-operative Group.

Unfortunately, at the Group AGM in Manchester on Saturday 16 May, it became clear that we had lost.

By a margin of 55 per cent to 45, Co-operative members had voted to keep the link.

So the Co-operative Group will continue its subscription to The Co-operative Party, giving it hundreds of thousands of pounds every year. The Co-operative Party will spend that money on developing policy and helping to elect and support Co-operative Party politicians—all of whom are in the Labour Party.

The Real Co-op campaign started because we believe that's wrong. We want real co-operative politics. There has been a transformation in political life in this country, and we can no longer pretend that the Labour Party has a monopoly on co-operative values.

Political funding

We believe the Co-operative Groups should keep political funding, because it's important to protect and promote the co-operative model, but it should not be restricted to one party and it should be under the open, democratic control of members.

It was always going to be a difficult fight to win. This is the first time that the Co-operative Group has had direct one-member-one-vote decision-making, and many people just didn't understand what was happening. Out of around 3 million eligible members, only around 900,000 actually voted.

We were also up against The Co-operative Party, the

Real Co-op campaigners vow to fight on to break Labour link



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END THE LABOUR LINK: the Labour Party doesn't have a monopoly on co-operative values

Labour Party, a well-funded PR and advertising campaign, and—in the final weeks—the Unite trade union, who wrote to its members urging them to vote in favour of the Co-op Party subscription.

We lost. We'd like to thank every member of the SSP who supported the campaign and the *Voice* for helping us get the word out. It's important that socialists support co-operation—it's one of the building blocks of the economy we'll build and run together, putting people's needs in place of private profit.

And the Real Co-op campaign is not going away. Several people elected onto the Co-operative Members' Council are Real Co-op supporters. We will have the opportunity to return to the issue of political funding in the future. And there are other important issues that we have to deal with.

The Co-operative Group's democracy is under threat by corporate interests, eroding the

control that member-owners have over the business. For example, we had to endure a phoney election for the posts of Member Directors on the Co-operative Board. There were three vacancies and just three candidates, making it certain that they would all be elected unopposed.

Shockingly, one of those directors is the disgraced former New Labour MP Hazel Blears: a woman who had to resign over flipped houses

and dodgy expenses now represents ordinary Co-operative members and is supposed to uphold co-operative values like honesty and fairness. You couldn't make it up. So the Real Co-op campaign will continue. And—with the help of socialist co-operators—we will make member control and real co-operative politics a reality in the Co-operative Group.

• See realcoop.net

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by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

THE QUEEN'S Speech, written by a Tory government elected by only 24.4 per cent of all eligible voters and in the case of Scotland, a government supported by a minuscule 10.5 per cent of registered vote, is saturated in hellish plans to butcher benefits, wipe out workers' rights and slaughter services—class warfare on the millions by a government of the millionaires with no mandate.

That perfectly captures the undemocratic nature of capitalist rule through Westminster which must be defied by a united mass movement of resistance, or generations to come will suffer the consequences.

With callous disregard for the facts, David Cameron declared:

“We have a mandate from the British people, a clear manifesto and the instruction to deliver. We will not waste a single moment in getting on with the task.”

They plan to forge ahead with a blitzkrieg on workers' rights and the incomes of millions already struggling to survive.

Shameless, racist measures designed to whip up division amongst the victims of Tory rule include new immigration laws that amount to ‘deport now, appeal later’—which in many cases would mean appealing against deportation after death in the war-torn countries people have fled from.

Benefits targeted

The core of the Tories' class warfare is directed at the working class majority population. A blitz on benefits and wipeout of workers' rights.

Of their total £30billion cuts, an additional £12billion benefit cuts are planned.

According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies these plans it will especially be the working poor, particularly those with children, who will suffer the most severely.

They point out that the much-trumpeted benefits cap, being cut from £26,000 to £23,000 for a household, will hammer families with several children and high rents, cutting about 24,000 families' incomes by £3,000 a year. But as fewer than 100,000 families across the UK will be impacted, this will only meet about £0.1billion of the Tories' total £12billion target.

Abolition of housing benefits to jobseekers aged 18-21 may therefore be extended to all those under 25; an outrageous attack on those starting out in life.

As Tax Credits (£30billion a year) and Housing Benefits (£26billion a year) make

BETTER TO BREAK BAD LAWS THAN BREAK WORKERS' BACKS!

PHOTO: Craig Maclean



up more than half of all ‘unprotected’ public spending, and Disability and Incapacity Benefits a further third of the total, the IFS rightly forecasts that the bulk of the cuts will target these people.

As they put it, “About 80 per cent of entitlements to benefits go to working age families, and a large majority of these benefits are means-tested, so it will be very difficult to avoid hitting low-income families—especially those with children—hardest.” And they add that 75 per cent of benefits go to families in the bottom half of incomes.

This starkly underlines the tsunami of cuts about to hit the working class and poorest, unless we build mass resistance.

Slashing the numbers entitled to Carers' Allowances by 40 per cent; cutting £3.8billion off Tax Credits, by hounding part-time workers with impossible new targets on additional hours of work; slaughtering an estimated 1.3 million public sector jobs by 2019: these are some of the appalling measures leaked out before Her Majesty even got round to announcing the Tory Butchers' plans for the people who never gave them a mandate.

Pivotal to this class warfare are plans to virtually abolish trade union rights. The government that won a grand total of 36 per cent of all votes cast, and a mere 24.4 per cent of eligible voters, is imposing rules that demand a 50 per cent turnout and at

least 40 per cent of all eligible voters before a union can take any form of legal industrial action in defence of jobs, services or workers' rights.

So in a workforce of 200, at least 100 would have to vote, and at least 80 of them vote for the action—an almost impossible set of hurdles designed to stop effective resistance by the organisations that are the first and last line of defence for workers—their unions.

Their manifesto homed in on introducing the 40 per cent threshold first in “those essential services—health, education, fire and transport”; services they regard as far from essential as they slash their funding! But of course they will spread their legal poison to every sector if they get away with it in the ‘essential services’.

Build 20 June demo

On top of that, the Tory election manifesto made it brutally plain what to expect if workers dare defy their pursuit of profit maximisation. To quote the Tory statement of intent:

“We will repeal nonsensical restrictions banning employers from hiring agency staff to provide essential cover during strikes.”

So they plan to scrap the current ban on use of Agency workers to scab on strikes, so they can conscript desperate and insecure people into further undermining fellow workers' wages, jobs and conditions.

A massive campaign of resistance needs to be mounted, in the parliament, in the workplaces, on the streets, in our communities.

It is therefore extremely good news that the Scottish TUC has called the 'Scotland United Against Austerity' mass demo in Glasgow on Saturday 20 June—an idea the SSP pushed for from the day after the election outcome. We all need to build that into a mammoth show of unity against all forms of cuts and attacks on workers' rights.

And it needs to become the platform to launch an ongoing resistance.

This to include a concerted demand for powers over the minimum wage to be devolved to Scotland so we can fight for a Scottish £10-an-hour minimum wage for all over 16, with equal pay for women.

A campaign to win devolution of powers over employment laws, so as to repeal the lot and usher in a Charter of Workers' Rights instead.

A campaign to win power for Holyrood over business taxes—but not so as to reduce taxation of big business, as the SNP wish, but to restore Corporation Tax to its 50 per cent pre-Thatcher level, as demanded by the SSP.

Build mass defiance

Whilst fighting for such powers to protect the Scottish working class from Tory dictatorship, the STUC and union leaderships also need to square up to the fact that submission to the anti-union laws means accepting literal destitution and starvation for big sections of working class people.

The unions literally wouldn't exist if our predecessors had meekly accepted the 'laws of the land', written and imposed by an upper-class minority hell-bent on squeezing the last drop of profit and privilege for themselves out of the sweated labour of the real wealth-creators.

Nobody would lightly hand over union assets—accumulated from workers' union subs—but unless union leaders are prepared to defy these anti-union laws, workers will have no chance.

It's better to break bad anti-union laws than allow the Tories and profiteering employers to break the backs of workers.

Join the SSP in defiance of Tory dictatorship. Help build the STUC demo on 20 June. Resolve to resist the slaughter of jobs, services, benefits and workers' rights by a government with no popular mandate to rule and ruin. United in determined action we can defeat the Tories class war.

'We can't give up on Zero Hours Contracts just because the Tories have a majority'

Richie Venton spoke to **Alan Milne**, Scottish Organiser of the Bakers, Food & Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) on current events and campaigns.

What's been happening lately on the campaign amongst fast food workers?

We had a very strong showing on 15 April on the Hungry for Justice fast food campaign for £10 Now as a minimum of wage, an end to Zero Hours Contracts, and union organisation in the fast food restaurants. And it wasn't just here, but across Europe and the US. There they've won \$15 minimum, not just in Seattle but also Los Angeles. We need to move it further on in this country. We need to keep putting across the message, raising public awareness.

We are still targeting areas, on different dates at the moment, such as McDonald's, who are abusing the system and abusing people. They've been shown up for dodging taxes, so they're getting virtually free labour, where we fund top-ups to wages because workers can't survive, and McDonald's walk away with all the profits.

We want to organise people in fast food restaurants and we've had some success, with young people joining the union. We're still at an early phase compared with the US, but we won't let this drop.

Where do you think the outcome of the general election leaves you, where Scotland had a landslide against the Tories, but they got won in Westminster?

Scotland certainly voted massively against the Tories, but in my opinion the SNP won't go near the £10 minimum either, unless we push, push, push.

If they're willing to work with the unions, then great, but we need to see what emerges. And Scotland has austerity programmes too, just like England, which we have got to really fight to stop.

The £10 minimum would solve a lot of problems in the country. It would take

people out of welfare benefits and they'd contribute to society. We can't give up on Zero Hours Contracts either, just because the Tories have a majority. We need more demos against government cuts.

The SSP is campaigning for power over the minimum wage to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament so that we can win a Scottish £10 minimum. What do you think?

I have no problem with that idea, it sounds right. Scotland could show an example to everyone else. And if people have concerns about companies moving out of Scotland, we need to look at the US, where areas have now got the \$15, and it seems to work for them. We need to use any evidence like this, where it works for people and the state.

Those who argue we can't afford £10 should remember they said the same when the minimum wage was introduced.

At the time we had security guards on £1-an-hour, but those companies survived. We've let the minimum wage slip and we need to build it up again.

What's your view of the Tories' plans on anti-union laws?

The Tories will attack the unions every chance they get. That's the kind of party they are. I was watching a programme about Churchill. Nothing's changed since then, they still are against working people being successful, still against unions and the working class.

Their new laws on balloting would make it impossible to take industrial action. The Tories were elected with a much lower share of the vote than they expect from the unions.

It's absolutely disgusting, totally undemocratic. We need to look at going back to workplace ballots where people put their hands up, that's fair and reasonable. In other words, we're heading for a dictatorship.

WORKPLACE FERRIES: SOLD DOWN THE RIVER?

by Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace organiser

BACK IN May 2012, the Northern Isles ferry service was privatised by the Scottish Government, who handed the £350million contract to private company Serco, in preference to the bid by public sector CalMac.

Now, the *Shetland Times* has revealed that CalMac's tender, which was believed to be cheaper than Serco's, was returned unopened by Transport Scotland, an arm of the Scottish Government!

The SNP government boosted the public subsidy to Serco by about £40million, a 20 per cent increase. The Serco contract led to redundancies, and a threat to workers' pensions, which was only withdrawn after RMT members voted overwhelmingly to strike. Now the £1billion contract for Clyde and Hebrides lifeline ferries, which serve remote communities, has been put out to tender by the same government—seeking a contract for eight years from October 2016.

Strike ballot

The RMT and the other ferry unions are deeply concerned, and suspicious that this amounts to plans to privatise that ferry service too—but with the announcement delayed until after



CONCERNS: CalMac's tender was returned unopened by Transport Scotland, an arm of the Scottish Government

the May 2016 Scottish elections! And workers' conditions are again threatened, which has provoked a strike ballot by the RMT, representing about 680 of the 1,400-strong workforce.

I spoke to an RMT member with the Clyde and Hebrides ferries about the issues at stake:

"Since last December we've had meetings of the STUC and the four trade unions involved—RMT, Unite, Nautilus and TSSA—with the government and sought guarantees on job security, conditions of service and pensions off the companies tendering for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service.

"We thought we'd reached an agreement we could live with, but then we were told the Scottish Government would only underwrite our pensions if the Pension

scheme was reformed by the end 2015. We had written to CalMac earlier, insisting on written guarantees on job security through no compulsory redundancies, defence of conditions and no change to the pensions without union agreement. They gave no guarantees, and on the back of that we met with Keith Brown and Derek Mackay from the Scottish Government—we are meeting them again this week.

"We will be telling them the demands on us are totally unacceptable. One big issue is pensions. They've given us only six months to reform the pension scheme. And the reforms they are demanding are that our contributions increase from 6 per cent to 9.5 per cent; that the pension is tied to the state retirement age, meaning we could be working until we're 68;

and that it is downgraded from a Final Salary to a Career Average scheme. So we're being asked to pay more, work longer, and get less when we retire!

"Against our better judgement, the CalMac ferries were put out to tender. The government hoped for at least five companies bidding for the tender, but nobody is interested because there's a claw-back of some of the profits to the government. So the only two companies tendering are CalMac and Serco.

Serco's record

"We don't think Serco are fit to bid for a public service contract, given their financial state and their track record with the Northern Isles ferries and Caledonia sleepers. It looks to us as if CalMac is being set up for privatisation. Because both CalMac and the unions had a gun put to their heads, giving us just six months to reform the pension scheme, so that when that doesn't happen they can claim CalMac is not fit to run the service.

"And CalMac at the moment seems to be run by consultants on £1,400 to £1,500 a day—overruling directors on over £100,000 a year! Something's not right. This doesn't add up to the alleged Memorandum of Understanding between the Scottish Government and the STUC!"



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John McAllion assesses
Scottish Labour's fall

LABOUR'S CATAclySMIC

electoral defeat has sparked the resignation of its losing leaders north and south of the border, the simultaneous launch of electoral contests to select their replacements and a tidal wave of anguished soul searching over what can be done to save a political party that not so long ago laid claim to being the natural party of government in the UK.

However, the prospect for genuine political renewal or for moving the party leftwards remains remote. All of the candidates to replace Ed Miliband come from the same Oxbridge background as their fallen leader.

Andy Burnham and Yvette Cooper, the main contenders, were leading players in Gordon Brown's Cabinet and in Ed Miliband's Shadow Cabinet. Since declaring their candidatures they have been busy denouncing the policies they only recently espoused and positioning themselves to the right of "Red Ed". The only other serious candidate, Liz Kendall, is unashamedly Blairite.

'Spirit of 97'

The prospects for Labour renewal in Scotland are even worse. South of the border, Labour is moving inexorably to the right as it seeks to see off UKIP in its northern heartlands and the Tories in England's southern shires. Winning back these right-leaning voters will now be UK Labour's key strategic objective.

Already Andy Burnham, allegedly the left candidate in the contest, is calling for a renewal of the "spirit of 1997" when Tony Blair swept the country by occupying what had previously been right-wing Tory positions. None of this will help Scottish Labour outflanked from its left by the SNP.

Scottish Labour has also now lost all of its supposed political big hitters. Murphy is already written off as yesterday's man. A

Scottish Labour's main business now is to avoid extinction



KEZIA DUGDALE: wants to replace most Labour MSPs with 'new talent'

few short weeks ago, Douglas Alexander and Margaret Curran were preparing for government. Today they are shrouded in political obscurity. The party's second tier politicians in Holyrood are largely unknown and untested. The favourite to become the next Scottish leader was elected as a list member only at the last Scottish election. She has never won a constituency contest.

To date those involved in the Scottish leadership contest have failed to impress. Jim Murphy used his resignation speech to vilify the leader of the biggest trade union still supporting Labour. Ken McIntosh, a contender to replace him, complained of bullying and intimidation by a party machine determined to deny a democratic choice to Labour's Scottish members. The favourite, Kezia Dugdale, began her cam-

paign by registering a vote of no confidence in her fellow list MSPs, promising to replace most of them with new talent at the next Scottish election.

When he launched the Labour manifesto just over a month ago, Jim Murphy boasted that "the party of John Smith and Donald Dewar was back in business". Three short weeks later, that party lost 40 of its 41 Scottish seats, saw its percentage share of the Scottish vote collapse by a staggering 18 points and found itself reduced to a single Scottish MP.

The main business of Scottish Labour is now to avoid political extinction. A repeat of this year's electoral disaster in 2016 will seal the political death of Scottish Labour.

The near death experience of this year's election has stimulated some new thinking. Some

are calling for the Scottish party to be fully autonomous and independent from the rest of UK Labour. Presumably such an independent Labour Party in Scotland would be in sovereign control of the entire range of policies with its sole MP refusing to take the UK Labour whip in the Commons. Whether this would be an appealing prospect for the UK wide unions who would be expected to fund such a body is another matter.

To do so they would be required to fund a party in Scotland that on a range of issues from Trident to public ownership would oppose the party the same unions are already funding at a UK level. In any case, an independent Scottish Labour Party opposed to independence for Scotland carries within it its own internal contradictions.

A new left

No political party has the right to endless existence. Some commentators are now suggesting that the era of British Labour may well be over and that it is time for something new on the left of politics.

At the post-war pinnacle of its influence, the British Labour Party did represent the interests and aspirations of most of the British working class. A massive redistribution of wealth and power in favour of working people was achieved through policies such as the NHS, the welfare state, public ownership and full employment. The party also had the then unquestioning support of a united trade union movement that represented the bulk of working people on the island.

The reality is that the social, economic and political context that underpinned that ascendancy has now changed, changed utterly and a new reality has been born. A new kind of left is coming into existence in countries across Europe. Labour's near extinction in Scotland may be the portent that the time for that new left has arrived on this island.

Spanish local elections: 'Sí, se puede!' Yes, you can!

LEFT SCORE BIG GAINS IN SPAIN

by Dick Nichols, in Barcelona

WELL BEFORE the polling stations closed we knew that something special was happening in the May 24 Spanish elections for local councils and for 13 of the country's 17 regional governments. Working people, people on welfare, young people without a future were coming out to have their say.

They were doing it not by voting for the traditional majority party of the working class vote—the Party of Catalan Socialists (PSC), the Catalan affiliate of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE)—but for Barcelona Together.

Barcelona Together is a citizen's election platform supported by the majority of the radical left in Catalonia—new force Podemos, the more traditional Initiative for Catalonia-Greens (ICV), the United and Alternative Left (EUiA), the Spanish green party Equo and Constituent Process, a movement to develop a constitution for a “Catalan republic of the 99 per cent”. Its figurehead and candidate for mayoress is Ada Colau, probably Spain's most respected social activist in her former role as spokesperson of the Mortgage Victims Platform, the movement against evictions and for housing justice.

Revived activism

Barcelona Together brought together the political and social left, and in the process revived and attracted the activism of thousands. Its program and activities were developed “from the bottom up”, indignado-style. It held hundreds of street meetings in the working-class neighbourhoods in the knowledge that its chances of winning depended on convincing people indifferent to “politics” that this time was different.

The result was that feared by the ruling elites, Catalan and Spanish. Barcelona Together took the city by defeating the right-nationalist mayoralty of Convergence and Union (CiU), also governing in Catalonia as a whole.

Its win was accompanied by a rise in the overall left vote, as the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) increased its council representation and the left-nationalist Popular Unity Candidacies (CUP) entered the 41-seat council for the first time.

This left surge also shifted the balance



within the bloc of Catalan pro-independence parties, the ERC, CUP and CiU. When joined by Barcelona Together forces supporting a Catalan right to decide have a decisive majority on Barcelona city council for the first time ever.

Barcelona Together was not alone on May 24. Similar citizen's movements backed by left coalitions won the city councils of Madrid, where retired judge and former labour rights lawyer Manuela Carmena, candidate of Madrid Now!, will be the new mayoress. A Coruña and Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Zaragoza in Aragon and Cadiz in Andalusia saw similar wins.

Those breakthroughs have stirred up politics in Spain like nothing since the birth of the indignados movement in May 2011. The right-wing media headlines read: “Indignados take Madrid” and “Colau okupes Barcelona City Council”. (In Spanish an okupa is an anti-eviction squatter).

In the celebrations on victory night a popular chant—along with “Sí, se puede!” [Yes, we can!]¹—was “Yes, you do represent us!”, a positive reworking of the indignado chant first heard in May 2011: “They don't represent us!”

The wins represent the high-tide mark of an election that has seen the ruling People's Party (PP) vote fall to 27 per cent (from 37.54 per cent in 2011) and the opposition PSOE vote

drop to 25 per cent (from 27.03 per cent). The all-of-Spain vote for Citizens, the right wing “anti-Podemos”, was only 6.55 per cent.

At the same time, in the 13 of the country's 17 autonomous communities (states) where elections were also held, Podemos made its debut in national Spanish politics with a vote of between 8.83 per cent and 20.5 per cent, averaging 14.46 per cent. (In the local government elections, Podemos did not stand in its own name, but as part of broader coalitions.)

Uneven shift

Nonetheless, a majority of the country's provincial capitals and 11 of the 13 autonomous communities will continue to be run by either the PP or PSOE. This result comes from the unevenness of the leftward shift. It has been strong enough to wipe out all the PP's previous absolute majorities, but not so powerful as to lift the radical left above the PSOE except in a minority of cases.

At the level of the Spanish state, the vote to the left of the PSOE was between 20 per cent and 25 per cent. Podemos managed to overtake the PSOE in only one autonomous community, Navarra, although it also beat the PSOE in sub-regional elections in the Basque Country (Euskadi). Podemos came closest to the PSOE in Aragon (20.5 per cent to 21.4 per cent for the PSOE), the Balearic

Islands (14.7 per cent to 18.95 per cent) and the Madrid region (18.6 per cent to 25.5 per cent). In Asturias, the combined United Left (IU) and Podemos vote (30.9 per cent) was greater than the PSOE's (26.4 per cent).

In the race for the 57-seat Madrid city council, Madrid Now!, in which Podemos merged with a series of splits from IU, won 31.8 per cent of the vote (20 seats). The Madrid Now! vote more than doubled that of the PSOE (15.2 per cent).

May 24 was a disaster for the PP. It lost Extremadura, the Valencian Community and the Balearic Islands. Depending on what alliance can be built to its left, it also stands to lose Castilla-la Mancha, Aragon and Cantabria. Its reactionary regional ally in Navarra, the UPN, could fall to an alliance of left and left-nationalist forces.

The PSOE leadership knows which way the wind is blowing and so it is talking left. "The PSOE will participate in the creation of left governments that will be the beginning of the end of the PP nightmare", said leader Pedro Sánchez after the party leadership had studied the results of May 24.

Urgent debate

Also, because the PSOE vote declined less than the PP's it has been possible to present its result as a victory. However, it has serious problems in the regions where the leftward shift was greatest. On Barcelona city council, which it administered for 32 years, and where it was still the second party in 2011, it is now fifth.

While the result of Podemos was not the huge leap hoped for when it led in some Spanish opinion polls at the beginning of the year, it is still represents a big advance for the left as a whole. However, the result does leave Podemos with an urgent debate about how it can best contribute to building a more powerful anti-austerity left. Should it continue to run its own name, or aim to extend the Barcelona Together example to other political contests?

This is also a question for IU, which, despite all its difficulties, held up at the municipal level. Alberto Garzon, the IU's lead candidate in the forthcoming national elections commented: "Change will not be possible without popular unity. That is the obvious lesson."

• *Dick Nichols is the European correspondent of Green Left Weekly and Links – International Journal of Socialist Renewal. See the latter for a more detailed analysis.*



Energy companies tax the poor

by Sandra Webster,
SSP national co-spokesperson

A NEW government, and will anything change? Politicians may eloquently preach about life with fuel poverty meanwhile it was announced that under the coalition 30,000 prepayment meters had been fitted without the consent of the individual. There are very few people who can gain access to your house without permission. These include police with a warrant and workmen from energy companies who can gain access to one's home and fit a prepayment meter. The Labour Party's record is not much better. In 1999 it was reported that again 30,000 people had been forced into a prepayment meter, with 24,000 of these authorised by court action. This is fuel possession.

Warrant sales

Thanks to the SSP, warrant sales are no longer permitted, but a workman can make forced entry into your home when you are not there and fit a prepayment meter. This happened to 'Mandy' a young mother who came home to find a prepayment gas meter had been fitted in the gas meter in her back garden.

She explained: "Things had just got on top of me and I had fallen behind with my gas bills. It was a bitter winter and my two-year-old was complaining of being cold. I put the heating on for him. I hid the letters but it was a shock when I came home to find out what they had done. They had also capped the gas. I had no credit on my phone so had to ask a neighbour if I could use theirs. It took an hour for me being on hold until they answered and arranged for someone to come out. I was given a card. Money is tight but I try and put more in the summer so I have extra in the winter. But my boy comes first. He eats before me."

The rhetoric of this government would por-

tray 'Mandy' as being one of the feckless poor. She is not—she is a young woman caught up in circumstances beyond her control and despite what programmes like Benefits Street might preach, life on benefits is difficult.

Fuel poverty

People should be praised for managing to live on the basic amount they are given. Fuel poverty, even the government's definition, is on the increase. When do you know that you live in fuel poverty? When you have to worry about how much it costs to cook a meal or run a bath for an incontinent child who may need one several times a day.

Prepayment meters are almost 7 per cent more expensive than paying your bill through direct debit. It is estimated that cold homes cause 30,000 deaths a year with 20,000 of this group being elderly. This is the human cost of austerity. It kills. Energy supply is in the hands of large corporations who exist to make a profit for their shareholders. It is easy to dismiss the impact of being forced to disconnect oneself from the source of food and warmth because it happens to individuals in their own homes, silently and with little support.

It is like many of the attacks on the poor—designed to alienate individuals and to cause struggle, which prevents us having the energy to get involved in politics. Prepayment meters are a shame on our society, where people are placed after profit. It is only by renationalising energy creation and supply that fuel poverty can be tackled forever. That is why I am proud of our energy policies. So even before Queenie's speech, where we heard about more legislation that will impact on the most vulnerable, we knew that our families and friends should be supported, not further demonised. Ensuring the basic rights to heat and eat should not be a choice but a basic human right.

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SSP besiege Tories to protest axe wielding Queen's Speech

FROM INVERURIE in the North to Hawick in the South, SSP members took the party's outright rejection of Cameron's cuts to the door of Tory MSPs with protests at their constituency offices. SSP national workplace organiser Richie Venton, who coordinated the protests, said:

"This SSP action showed the spirit of defiance required against Tory cuts, with actions at Tory offices as far afield as Glasgow, Ayr, Paisley, Hamilton, Hawick, Arbroath, Inverurie and Edinburgh.

"Cameron's Westminster attacks will be resisted in our communities, workplaces, housing schemes and colleges.

"A minuscule 10 per cent of Scottish voters backed them, so they have no mandate to rule and ruin our lives.

"The SSP will help a campaign building for the STUC demo against austerity on 20 June, and campaigning for collective defiance of their anti-union laws by Scotland's organised workers.

"The response of people driving home was tremendous. We could hardly hear ourselves for the volume of horns tooting in support."

PHOTOS: Alan Ferguson, Craig Maclean, Connor Beaton, Bruce Scott, Neil Scott. Apologies to uncredited photographers