



A new Scotland is necessary: Sillars, Bissett and Kane on why an effective left wing force is needed inside and outside of Holyrood

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Scottish Socialist Voice

END THE FRAUD OF AUSTERITY

Make another Scotland possible



ACTION: we need to resist Tory plans to butcher benefits, wipe out workers' wages and rights, and slaughter services and jobs

PHOTO: Craig Maclean



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Standing up for Scotland needs more than parliamentary soundbites

by Ken Ferguson

THE HOPES raised by May's stunning election result are set to come under increasing pressure as the Tories scent the blood of majority power and move decisively to act in the class interests of the wealthy and powerful they represent.

The shape of the coming assault is ever more clear with massive spending cuts set to be reinforced in the July budget, an ever more shrill campaign to demonise claimants and further shackles for trade unions restricting further their ability to defend workers rights.

For the all-conquering SNP, swept to power to a large extent by the progressive

energy generated by a mass Yes movement and its vision of a socially just Scotland—currently soaring even higher in the polls—the collision with Tory arrogance cannot long be delayed.

The SNP claim to the mantle of the anti-austerity party—already dented by their record of council cuts—will have to meet the challenge of the Osborne budget axe which, outside Holyrood and Westminster means sackings, pegged pay and more benefit misery.

Despite the oceans of printer's ink spilt in cuddly profiles of the new MPs and the parliamentary jousting with Mr Speaker, the SNP slogan of Standing up For Scotland must soon answer the

hard question—which Scotland?

It was Labour legend Nye Bevan who said that the Tories didn't preach class war as they were too busy practising it and this is the reality facing the progressive opponents of austerity—cuts for the majority, megabucks for the rich.

Scotland's majority

Faced with this prospect, the impressive STUC Scotland United Against Austerity event must be taken both as a pointer to the need to campaign across society for a changed direction and for the event to be the first step in such a campaign.

For the SNP, the pitch of being 'Scotland's party' must confront the reality that, if it is to be translated into reality, that needs to mean siding with Scotland's working class majority against the cuts and not accepting Tory diktats and implementing them.

For the pro-independence left, this means building the anti-austerity movement, working for socialist ideas in and out of the Holyrood parliament and keeping the reality that independence remains a key and necessary aim before the public.

The energy generated by the progressive left and a range of

mass organisation which produced the progressive vision of an independent Scotland was the underpinning mood that produced May's result and it must be built on.

That's why anti-austerity words need to be translated into anti-austerity deeds, and the link made between the defence of existing jobs, wages and benefits and the need to transform Scotland with concrete demands for change.

Scrap Council Tax

In this *Voice*, we outline the case, for example, for scrapping the Council Tax and replacing it with an income based Scottish Service Tax which makes the wealthy pay most, cuts bills and generates extra cash for services.

It's workable, redistributive and within Holyrood's current powers—and stands up for Scotland's majority.

The key need is for the austerity fight to go beyond defence and to paint a vision of how demands for decent affordable rented homes, fair pay and public ownership of Scotland's natural resources and key services can be won.

That way opens the road to a socially just, sustainable people before profit society which certainly would be standing up for Scotland.



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by Alan Bissett

I WRITE this the morning after the Scotland Bill was debated in the House of Commons and am still shocked at how nakedly the Unionist parties showed their contempt for us.

Westminster voted down the SNP's Full Fiscal Autonomy proposals, despite there being a clear mandate for it from Scottish voters during the General Election. This wasn't a surprise in itself, but still an indication that both parties are determined to keep Scotland within the tight financial straitjacket imposed from London.

It's also clear that Home Rule is, as far as the Unionists are concerned, a ship that has sailed.

It was obvious to many of us before the referendum why the Tories were sending Gordon Brown out as an emissary with the words 'Home Rule' on his lips: plausible deniability.

Being a mere backbench MP, it was not within Brown's gift to guarantee more power—Yes campaigners and the Tories both knew this—which is why David Mundell, Secretary of State for Scotland, can now say that 'Home Rule' was never promised in the first place.

Vow was immaterial

Not only that, but Mundell claims the infamous Vow was immaterial anyway, referencing a poll conducted by YouGov in March which found that only 3.4 per cent of No voters cited 'more powers' as the main factor in their decision.

This is misleading. People base their vote on a combination of reasons, not just a single 'main' one. The Vow formed part of the No campaign's crucial last few days, as they knew it might be just enough to reassure waverers.

Those of us on the Yes side could see from a mile away that the Vow was both vague and far from legally-binding, so that, no matter what they did afterwards, they could claim they had ful-

BATTLE FOR A SOCIALIST SCOTLAND NEEDS UNITY



INDYREF: working together to take on an incredibly powerful foe
PHOTO: Craig Maclean

filled it or that, if cornered, it didn't really matter because, after all, what exactly had been promised?

This game of smoke and mirrors was evident in the Tories' reaction to the SNP's amendment to the Scotland Bill, requesting that our parliament could only be dissolved by consent of the Scottish people. This was the Vow's very first and headline promise: 'The Scottish Parliament is permanent.'

The Tories voted down the amendment—knowing full-well that it broke commitments Cameron had made—simply as a veiled threat, a flexing of muscles, a reminder of who is in charge.

Add to this the proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act and trades unions' rights, the vetoes which the Tories have worked into the Scotland Bill, including a crucial one over welfare, and of course the income tax trap. This new 'power' means the SNP will be forced into raising taxes on working people (as opposed to, say, corporations) or cutting public services, to offset budgetary constraints from Westminster.

So we can see that the No vote has placed Scotland exactly where the Tories want us: squirming and powerless to resist their austerity onslaught.

There are even theories circulating that the Tories are trying to goad the Scots into a quick, second referendum, in the hope that another defeat really would kill off the dream. We should be wary of this, and call a referendum on our terms at a time of our choosing. Another five years of Tory pain—with a potential EU exit thrown in—is hardly likely to cement love for the Union among Scots already disenchanted with the aftermath of the No vote.

It's one thing to identify the problems, however, and another to act on them.

We could pray that the left-wing Jeremy Corbyn is elected as leader of the Labour party, although this seems far-fetched given the other three candidates are Blairites, charging towards Planet Tory.

We could hope that Scottish Labour divorces itself from the UK party and reconnects with

its soul, north of the border. Again, unlikely.

Or we could take matters into our own hands by realigning the left in Scotland, a process which began during the long referendum campaign, when we all learned the value of working together to take on an incredibly powerful foe.

The result was the largest mass political awakening among the Scottish people of modern times. This is potential which has only begun to be tapped. The Unionists are finding it harder and harder to fool the Scots—as Labour's General Election wipeout shows—and the appetite for socialist policy in Scotland is rising.

I'm aware that not everyone in the SSP is in favour of an alliance with the Scottish Left Project for the Holyrood elections next year—and I respect their reasons—but we really do have far more in common than not, and we are going to need all hands to the pump.

New left opposition

There has to be an opposition in Holyrood, and I'm sure even the SNP would prefer it came from the pro-Yes left rather than the Unionist parties.

We ally with the SNP when it comes to the Westminster game, but the SNP having Holyrood all to themselves is not good for Scottish democracy or the socialist struggle.

Make no mistake: we are in dark times. The nightmare which many of us feared—a No vote followed by a Tory majority—has come to pass. It's important to understand the past, lest we be doomed to repeat it, but the real fight is in the future. The battle for a socialist Scotland continues.

Without power we are left with protest

Jim Sillars on why independence and a left Holyrood challenge is essential

AUSTERITY IS a socio-economic envelope which, for those in it, means low wages, zero hours contracts, constant anxiety about meeting energy bills, being skint early in the month, sanctioned and made destitute when jobless, and recourse to food banks to feed the children. For all bar the rich, it means cuts in the public services.

These are the most obvious effects and consequences, but there is another factor of austerity with long term implications for the kind of society we have known—a severe and permanent reduction in the role of the state in the economy and, above all, in the welfare system that protects the citizen from the full consequences of the wounds that life can inflict.

There are two kinds of wounds that people can suffer from. One, the state can do nothing to prevent: a family hurled into grief by an unexpected early death, death or injury by accidents, the loss by a child of a parent.

Unnecessary tears

But there are wounds that the state can deal and help with: unemployment, a mother in tears because she cannot feed her children, a human being humiliated by an agency of government, a person disabled, someone sick and needing medical attention.

On India's independence, Nehru said he had a great ambition, to wipe every unnecessary tear off every cheek. That is not possible. In those circumstances I have described, of life imposing pain that no state can prevent, tears on



FOOD BANKS:
the Tories mean to
make our fundamental
vulnerability
permanent

cheeks are unavoidable and very often needed.

But on those other life experiences of unemployment, imposed poverty, it is possible to wipe every tear off every cheek. That is what the welfare state is for, to help people in time of need who can be helped. And it is that welfare state that austerity is meant to dismantle.

That is what the Tories mean to achieve when they talk of a "smaller state."

Outside the small realm of the very rich, all people are vulnerable because they have nothing on which to build a good life than to sell their labour. The destruction of people and communities in the former coal mining areas is a classic example of that vulnerability laid bare.

Moving from an industrial society to a technological one does not alter that fundamental fact. If there is no state able to provide a framework of law and practice, to hold essential services in public hands, and so prevent that vulnerability being exploited, then there can be no security and stability for those who sell their labour.

Working class Scots have known that truth through experience. Middle class Scots learnt it when the financial crisis broke over their heads. The founding principle of the modern state is the same as that upon which the trade unions was built, that together we are strong, divided we are weak.

A smaller state means a weaker people, but that does not mean that the smaller state apparatus cannot be employed for economic and social purposes that will render the people even weaker. That smaller state still has power, in the hands of the Tories, a malign power.

Deliberate division

They speak of "one nation" but engage in deliberate division, with the aim of further weakening the people through using the law to diminish the role and effectiveness of the trade unions.

It is quite natural for us, in our first approach to the austerity programme, to find it repulsive on moral grounds, and an outrageous attack upon the poorest who, like the serfs of old, can do nothing to prevent

the blows landing on their heads, as the *Daily Mail* conducts a modern pogrom against them. Yes the poor have to be defended as best we can, but we must look deeper and understand that what austerity really means is the re-structuring of our society, meant to make our fundamental vulnerability a permanence.

The answer to that growing vulnerability today is the same as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century: political organisation that aims at power in government, built upon a trade union base, and political campaigning and education among the people.

Without power, we are left with protest. Protest is not enough now against a Tory government that will not listen and cannot be replaced as long as Scotland remain within the UK. When the boundaries are changed, as they will be, the Tories in England will have a twenty seat advantage on top of those held at present. Faced with austerity, and then more austerity, there is only one way to escape and that is through independence and a new left seeking power at Holyrood.

by Pat Kane

AS THEY used to say about Frank Sinatra: it's a SNP world—we just live in it. Or at least it sometimes seems that way, in terms of the Scottish National Party's recent history.

A leading voice in the multi-and-no-party Yes movement which lead up to a 45 per cent endorsement for independence, the SNP has benefitted from that mobilisation (and a broken electoral system) to the tune of 56 MPs at the last General Election. A week ago, a poll put the SNP on 60 per cent of the constituency votes for the next Holyrood Elections in May 2016.

But as we know in Scotland, our "list" vote—the second candidate we vote for in our national elections, who gets in on their party's proportion of that region's votes—allows the opportunity to express our political complexity.

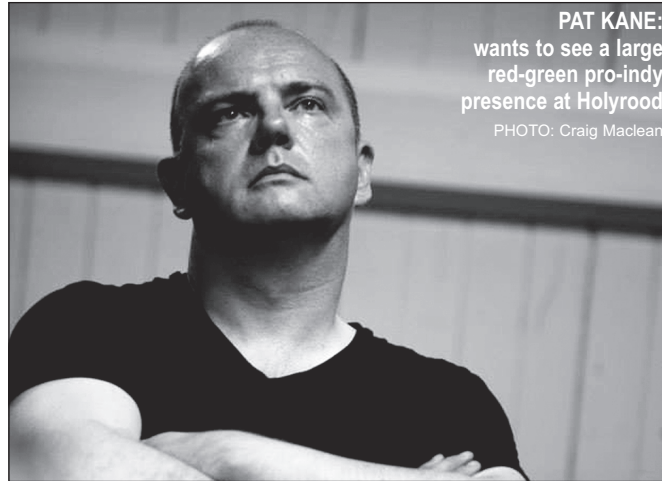
For years myself, I have flipped between voting SNP, Green and SSP, in various combinations of constituency and list, in Scottish elections. It feels like I'm being allowed to be a sophisticated citizen—and it feels like parties are being allowed to be exactly who they want to be.

Collapse of Labour

That moment is coming again. But post-18 September 2014, and 7 May 2015, means not just the ascendancy of the SNP but the sheer collapse of the Scottish Labour Party. So now I feel that my flexible voting patterns (thought not that flexible—I'll only vote for independence-supporting parties in Scotland) need some new degrees of movement.

Should the SNP be as dominant in the Holyrood Parliament as their Westminster representation makes them in Scotland? Let's be honest: it just doesn't feel right. Is it the SNP's fault that they are a brilliantly disciplined left-of-centre campaign machine and governing strategy? And that their primary opponents (Scottish Labour) are paying for

A RED/GREEN BLOC IS NEEDED AT HOLYROOD



PAT KANE:
wants to see a large
red-green pro-indy
presence at Holyrood
PHOTO: Craig Maclean

decades of complacency, patronisation and misunderstanding of the popular desire among Scots for self-rule? No to both.

But I always wonder what kind of White Paper would have been offered if it was an "independence majority" that had triggered the process, rather than an SNP majority in Holyrood.

Would we have had a more diverse front-foot political leadership of the movement? Would our currency options have been multi-option from the start?

Would we have avoiding trying to square removing Trident with joining the NATO nuclear umbrella? Would have had much stronger and more redistributive wage and fiscal policies?

Indeed it's the flaws in the SNP's "indy life" offer presented to the Scottish people the last time which makes me, once again, desire a multi-party "indy majority" at the next Holyrood election. We have to be ready for any of a number of factors tripping the next indyref process—both pull (eg, a majority mandate for that in a Scottish Parliament) and push (eg, the rise of a English national resistance to continued links with Scotland). But we have to go with a "prospectus" that is

a lot more straight and wise about the short-and-medium term outlooks for independence. The Syriza situation doesn't always travel well to the Scottish context.

Pre-any indy run up, we will not be (and we were not) fighting for our economic lives, with only the weapons of persuasion or withdrawal at our disposal. But we surely do recognise the degree of attack and intimidation by financial and political elites on the legitimacy and strategy of Syriza.

No matter their actions at a macro-level, they have built up a reserve of collective social trust in Greek society which makes the people ready for the next stage of struggle for their country. We have to build that same level of trust in Scotland—or perhaps test this new state of political awareness that's so often proclaimed.

And that will be generated by being honest with Scottish voters, about how Scots may have to tax more, and live with less, in order to shift the fundamental structures of an independent Scotland towards a more social-democratic, maybe even democratic-socialist norm.

In my mind, that honesty will only come about if a much bigger bloc of left-green parties, maintaining their commitment to independ-

ence—is playing a decisive role at Holyrood in May 2016. Ideally they'd hold the balance of power, but at the very least bite into the Labour seats—providing a huge representative symbol that independence was the eventual aim of the Scottish people. How does this work at the level of electoral tactics between, say, the Scottish Greens, and whatever collection of parties (including the SSP) the Left Project eventually unite under their banner? I don't know—I'm not an expert. But even as a Scottish Green party member, I am continually disappointed in my own party's tribalism.

In my online and offline conversations, too many are unwilling to even begin to work out what would be needed to maximise this left-green vote, in terms of merging candidates in appropriate areas, pooling activist resources, etc.

Radical front

Does it look like the Scottish Greens and Left Project/SSP will be duking it out for the share of the non-SNP Yes voter, or the utterly disillusioned left-wing Labour voters? Sadly it does. Do I think that parties only seem to respond to the inevitable after punching themselves repeatedly in the nose? Yes I do. So perhaps we need another SNP landslide, and the bloody-nosed failure of the Scots left and green parties, to forge the radical front that we should be able to build right now. Sigh. But if we want a radical democracy in Scotland, and we don't think the SNP are the only instrument to achieving it, some high-horses need to be unmounted. Sooner or later.

• *Pat Kane is a writer and musician, and board member of Common Weal*

by *Richie Venton,*
SSP national workplace
organiser

THE THOUSANDS joining the 20 June Scotland United Against Austerity rally are united in sending a simple, stark message to the Tories: you have no mandate to rule and ruin Scotland, and we're not going to lie down and accept your butchery!

Only 10 per cent of Scotland's voters backed the Tories. Yet Cameron, Osborne and their Old-Etonian bootboys plan an assault on our lives that surpasses even the Dark Ages of Maggie Thatcher.

They plan a 100-day blitzkrieg on benefits, public spending and workers' rights. Virtually every day they declare another attack on yet another section of the working class, including the poorest and most vulnerable.

Tory plans include £30billion cuts to public spending, £12billion of it from welfare.

Merciless cuts

An estimated £5billion slashed off in-work Tax Credits, hammering the lowest-paid, part-time workers, whilst making stomach-churning claims to being "one-nation Tories, party of the blue-collar worker".

Abolition of young people's housing benefit. A 40 per cent reduction of those getting Carers' Allowance. Cuts to child benefits. The list marches on, mercilessly.

The same government that only gained a derisory 24 per cent of all UK voters is hellbent on wiping out workers' rights, imposing near-impossible thresholds of a 50 per cent turnout, plus at least 40 per cent of all actual union members voting for industrial action, before it's legal.

BUILD MASS DEFIANCE OF TORY CUTS

Plus they plan to rip up facility time for elected union reps and to remove the ban on conscripting Agency workers to scab on strikes.

They want to impose workplace dictatorship, in pursuit of even bigger profits, lower wages and fewer jobs.

With such brutality coming down the track at us, the STUC and the unions that together organise 630,000 Scottish workers have a pivotal part to play in resisting the Tory onslaught.

The 20 June rally must not be a mere token gesture, but the launchpad for a concerted, determined course of further action, building an alliance of trade unionists, people on benefits, communities, and socialists prepared to defy and defeat the Tories. No time should be wasted over the summer months; as the Tory blitzkrieg unfolds, the unions should prepare the grounds for united, militant action to halt Cameron's juggernaut.

On Tory Emergency Budget day—8 July—the SSP plans protests to highlight opposition to the butchery that Osborne will announce. How much more significant it

would be if the STUC coordinated events across Scotland that day to give notice of the resistance that will be built over the next few weeks and months.

Potentially the STUC has unique power to spearhead a movement to stop austerity, raising concrete alternative policies at the same time as coordinating militant action.

Passing on cuts

Embracing 630,000 worker-members, it also has the advantage of not being officially tied to either the sinking ship of Labour, nor the SNP—which won a landslide by claiming to be anti-austerity, but has a real-life track record of passing on Westminster cuts at both Holyrood and council levels over the past four years.

The STUC and its affiliated unions need to call further mass events to bombard the Scottish government with demands to implement the mandate the SNP won for being anti-austerity, by refusing to implement a single penny of the budget cuts Scotland faces from Westminster.

They should demand the Scottish government set out

spending plans this Autumn that, as a bare minimum, save all jobs and public services, and boost workers' pay—and build a mass Scots rebellion demanding the funds off Westminster for these plans, rather than devolve Tory cuts to councils, FE colleges, schools and other vital services.

This is critical given the eye-watering scale of cuts forecast in new Scottish government spending projections. They expect a further cut of £2billion to Scotland's budget over the next three years; maybe even £3billion. At least half of that will hit councils.

As Professor John McLaren of Fiscal Affairs Scotland wrote, "Scotland, like the UK, is only about half way through the cuts to public services initiated by the UK government. Unlike earlier years it's expected to be day-to-day budgets, rather than capital budgets, that take the hit. At over 5 per cent in each of the next two years, the cuts could be more than double the average seen in the past four years."

Others have calculated the councils' share will mean the



TAKE ACTION NOW: we demand devolution of the powers to reverse all welfare and benefits cuts

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

equivalent of losing 9,700 secondary teachers, plus 8,900 senior social workers, plus 16,000 cleansing department workers.

So not only Holyrood, but local councillors, face a stark choice: stand up and defy the Tory cuts, building a mass movement of workers and communities to win back the stolen £billions off Westminster—or be forever condemned for carrying out the Tories' dirty work.

The STUC needs to launch a plan of action to push politicians into resistance, to make it politically unviable for the Tories to impose their plans. A whole nation in rebellion couldn't be ignored.

At the first sign of any group of workers being blocked by anti-union laws, the STUC should build support for defiance of these laws. It's better to break bad laws that allow the Tories to break workers' backs!

Several sections of workers are courageously taking action already: Dundee hospital porters; Glasgow homeless caseworkers; CalMac ferry crews against attacks on pensions, conditions and the threat of privatisation. How much less painful would these workers' struggles be if the laws were scrapped that ban solidarity action by fellow-workers?

SNP and privatisation

And neither Labour nor the SNP can lay claim to being on these workers' sides.

Glasgow City Council is Labour, but has kept strikers out on picket lines for 12 weeks, as well as refusing to reinstate sacked UNISON rep Robert O'Donnell at the SECC, which the Labour council owns 91 per cent of!

The SNP government is heading towards privatisation of the Clyde and Hebrides ferries, as they did the

Northern Isles ferries back in 2012. The unions need to spearhead an independent political alternative that defends workers' rights and incomes. They should stop funding Labour's anti-working class lost cause; they should instead stand on the socialist principles of labour movement pioneers.

The SSP has pioneered proposals that the STUC should take up and popularise; a fully-costed alternative way of funding councils, scrapping the unfair Council Tax, replacing it with an income-based Scottish Service Tax that would make 77 per cent of Scots better off, and literally double the funds for local jobs, wages and services. This proposal has the potential to help shield Scotland from austerity, especially as councils employ 247,000 workers and provide vital services.

Councillors—Labour, SNP or Green—face the stark choice of helping to build centres of resistance to the Tory austerity plans, building alliances of workers and communities to win the necessary funding, or they will be cursed for being central to the savagery of job losses and service decimation.

But the issue of austerity cuts goes far beyond the boundaries of councils.

The SSP appeals to trade unionists, community activists and their organisations—including the STUC—to join our campaign for powers to protect the Scottish working class to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Defy pay cuts

In facing the cataclysmic Tory attacks on jobs, wages, benefits and workers' rights, we demand devolution of the powers to reverse all welfare and benefits cuts; to defy pay cuts by implementing a Scottish £10-an-hour minimum wage for all aged 16 and over; to repeal all the anti-union laws and establish full workplace rights; to take all services, banks, energy and big industries into democratic public ownership, so as to create well-paid, secure jobs and begin to build a society that matches the needs of the millions, instead of the millionaires.

Join the SSP; help commit your trade union, your community group and your family to defiance of the Tories, and to the pursuit of socialist measures that could eradicate any and all excuses for cuts.

We live in an immensely rich nation: demand use of that wealth for the working-class majority population, not for the profits, perks and privileges of the stinking rich and their Tory henchmen.

by Connor Beaton

LIVING IN Dundee can sometimes feel like living ten years into the future. Not only was our city a decade ahead of the rest of the country in terms of the independence vote, but it may yet be the first part of the country to come to grips with the true political character of the Scottish National Party.

The SNP's purported left-wing credentials came under threat as it stood by and watched 117 porters at Ninewells and Royal Victoria Hospitals launch strike action in April, demanding compensation after being underpaid for over a decade.

An administrative error placed the essential staff in the wrong pay bracket and saw them cheated out of a total of £6 million, according to Unite officials.

The crux of the dispute was the discovery that porters at Ninewells, the biggest teaching hospital in Scotland, were on a lower pay band than porters at other hospitals across Scotland.

Arrogance

Despite the unfolding crisis at two hospitals in her own city, the Scottish Government health secretary Shona Robison MSP, who represents Dundee City East, was silent—refusing to even comment on the dispute.

It wasn't until SSP members, RIC activists and anti-sanctions campaigners came together to picket her constituency office in May as the Dundee Hospital Porters Support Group that the health secretary hastily arranged a meeting with the striking porters.

Even now, her primary contribution has been to urge a "compromise" between the workers on one hand, and on the other: a management that has acted with arrogance and treated both its employees and the people of Dundee with contempt.

NHS Tayside, rather than propose constructive talks with

Ninewells porters' action challenges 'left wing' SNP



NINEWELLS PORTERS: action has been spirited and defiant

workers, spent as much as £100,000 of public money trying to persuade the Court of Session to rule that the strike was illegal back in March, while the action was in its infancy.

It then tried to persuade nursing staff at Ninewells to fulfil porters' roles in collecting and transporting clean linen between wards.

There were complaints from the start of the dispute that management was making errors in docking workers' pay, leading some striking workers to be wrongly left out of pocket.

On the release of the Scottish Terms and Conditions Committee (STAC) report into the dispute, in the eleventh week from the start of the strike, the director of HR at NHS Tayside had the audacity to claim the employer's immediate priority would be to "work with our portering staff over the next few days on their return to work".

Management had to make an embarrassing come-down from

that position after it became clear that porters would not be returning to work without concessions. A statement published on Facebook on behalf of the porters read: "We are as strong and committed now today as we have been since day one."

So too is the remarkable and obvious public support for the porters, who work at one of the city's most essential institutions.

There is an instinctive position of sympathy from people throughout city, many of whom have offered donations and declared their support.

In stark contrast, Shona Robison's reluctance to offer solidarity and support to Dundee hospital workers lays bare the contradiction between the SNP's words and actions. The party brags of its Trade Union Group alone exceeding Scottish Labour in terms of membership, but has again failed to show how this translates into positive results for workers.

It has also exacerbated a growing discontent in communities like Menzieshill, five minutes' drive from Ninewells Hospital, where the SNP council administration are pushing forward deeply unpopular plans to close a secondary school.

A spirit of solidarity has even arisen between the porters and the parents, with striking porters joining Save Menzieshill High campaigners at a press photocall in May, before inviting both parents and pupils to return the favour at a subsequent picket of Shona Robison's office.

It is a promising development in a city whose radical traditions were reflected in its record 57 per cent vote for independence at last year's referendum.

A road forward

At time of writing, it remains to be seen whether NHS Tayside will abandon its bullish rhetoric in favour of a conciliatory approach to the vital workers whose industrial action has left Ninewells and Royal Victoria Hospital in disarray.

This has been a spirited, defiant action which has resonated with people across the city and will be remembered.

In ten years' time, the porters and their supporters in Dundee may well look back and reflect on how they were right to challenge the SNP to stand alongside workers and deliver fair pay at home amid their shouting from Westminster's green benches.

More pressingly, at next year's Holyrood elections, Dundonians should recall the cry that went up in the city before and after the party's landslide victory: "SNP—pay the porters now!"

by Sandra Webster, SSP
national co-spokesperson

A journey through austerity

RECENTLY, I WAS chatting to a neighbour in Glenburn. They asked me a question: "Sandra, what is austerity?"

I had to think what to say to a working class man who lives in my community. It brought home to me that those who protest against austerity have to bring communities affected along with them.

Rather than speeches, we need to have conversations with ordinary people and wake them up to the fact that austerity is an ideology.

Poverty is not anyone's fault except the policies of the Tory government who are enforcing it.

This government have the majority of the press in their hands. We have been softened up by the many stories of benefit scroungers while tax evaders receive knighthoods.

More Tory cuts

Osborne has called an "emergency" budget in July. There have been several leaks to the press about possible cuts including Child Benefit and Carer's Allowance.

Under 25s may no longer receive housing benefit. Osborne is putting his elbow into the political bath to gauge the temperature. What is certain however is that it is those with the greatest need will be impacted on.

It is important to remember that austerity affects the majority of us. Those who work in public services and voluntary organisations may be seen as some as living off the state. With cuts to local authority block grants, many people will lose their jobs. Many people will lose vital



GEORGE OSBORNE:
ordinary people suffer
as he dips his elbow
in the political bath to
gauge the temperature

services. Many people will be pushed over the edge. The government will of course blame people's inability to cope as their 'fault'. The term the 'feckless poor' has been with us for generations.

My friend remembers her dad telling her the story of him having to get shoes from the parish. As part of the shaming process, nails were punched into the soles of the boots so people could know this was a charity case. This is just two generations ago, before the welfare state.

Being poor now is a stigma, a character flaw. However those in poverty should be applauded for managing to live on a limited budget, sometimes less than an MP's breakfast.

Challenge stigma

It is our role to challenge the stigma and enable people living on the edge to be heard and to be at the forefront of all campaigns.

However, professionals have an obligation to fight austerity too. In 1939, when evacuation to the

countryside was at its height, children turned up to the country and their parents were blamed for being dirty and malnourished.

A committee of eight women was set up by the Women's Group on Public Welfare who came up with the conclusion that poverty, not parenting, was the issue. You may think that attitudes have changed but recently residents of an Oxfordshire village complained that Hackney Council's plan to have a holiday home situated there was not suitable as the families would be detrimental to their community. How many of them I wonder intellectualise

about poverty as long as it is not in their backyard?

Thanks to all who are attending the STUC rally on the 20 June. Let's not forget though, that as well as tackling austerity we need to protest about poverty.

More than just a demo but having conversations, building campaigns in our communities.

Let's give dignity back to people living in poverty and respect their day to day struggles. We need to tackle poverty, which has a global impact.

This is more than a struggle—it needs to be a war—and I hope you will be fighting in the frontline.



Join the SSP

Fill in this form and send it to: Scottish Socialist Party, Suite 370, 4th Floor, Central Chambers, 93 Hope St, Glasgow G2 6LD. Or phone: 07810205747. Or join the SSP online: scottishsocialistparty.org/join-us

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Westminster's Trojan horse sent north

Full Fiscal Autonomy and the Scotland Bill

by Colin Fox, SSP
national co-spokesperson

I MET THE eminent economists Jim and Margaret Cuthbert of Stirling University this week to discuss the details of the Tories plans for so called 'Full Fiscal Autonomy' and the new Scotland Bill. We both heralded the earlier than usual arrival of the 'silly season' at Westminster.

The columnist David Torrance writing in *The Scotsman* this week probably put the issues best when comparing Full Fiscal Autonomy [FFA] to the famously inscrutable Schleswig-Holstein Question that vexed 19th century Germany and Denmark. FFA he said sees the "SNP ask for things they don't really want, the UK Government make sure they don't get it by insisting 'it's bad for Scotland', before the SNP finally claims they have been deprived of something vitally important."

Devil in the detail

When asked during the General Election whether the SSP supported FFA or not, I tended to reply it really depends on what it means. For the devil is as they say 'in the detail'. Extending powers to Holyrood is by and large something the independence movement favours as another stepping-stone to complete self-determination. But in practice it clearly depends on what specific powers are proposed and what conditions are attached to the offer.

The 'full autonomy' proposed by the Tories is in fact nothing of the kind. Incidentally, the deeply flawed Scotland Bill does not offer the FFA the Tories hypothetically pose. Rather it is a rehash of the non-event that was the Smith Commission. And in fact, as the Cuthberts have pointed out in the excellent paper they



SNP SPLIT ON SCOTLAND BILL: it obviously signed up to and supported it at the Smith stage, but now that it has 95 per cent of Scotland's MPs, it is desperately trying to get out of it

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

produced for the Jimmy Reid Foundation, it represents a trap for the independence movement.

Why is FFA a trap? Because it proposes very limited extra tax raising powers and devolves decisions to Holyrood which passes on unpopular spending cuts rather than leave them with Westminster. Whilst it proposes that income tax rates are set in Scotland, and extra monies raised here remain in Scotland under the Barnett Formula's 'no detriment' rule, all additional revenues are deducted from the Westminster block grant so that neither side is adversely affected financially by the changes. Moreover, FFA does not propose the devolution of any other taxes such as oil and gas, VAT, the duty on alcohol, fuel and tobacco, Capital Gains Tax, Corporation Tax, etc. The FFA the Tories want merely proposes to devolve Air Passenger Duty, the Aggregates

Tax and some welfare powers.

The Cuthberts point out that Scotland stands to gain very little and risks a great deal from this arrangement. We continue to have very little control over our economy of its financial levers.

Income tax is a very limited dividend offering little room for manoeuvre and, it could be argued, could even be politically detrimental. If for example the Tories at Westminster cut income tax South of the Border and balanced the books by reducing spending on reserved matters like defence or overseas aid, Holyrood would be forced to match the new rate and yet could only cut devolved expenditures like health, education or local government. That would be wholly unpopular politically, and the Tories realise that.

As well as falling short on the income side the FFA the Tories and their Labour allies envisage,

it also sees Scotland obliged to pay a proportionate contribution towards the UK's historic debt (one we played no part in deciding), a share of Britain's EU contributions (without any say at the top table), as well as billions towards defence and foreign affairs expenditures (again with little political input on its objective).

FFA was historically deemed to mean Scotland would keep all its own revenues and pay for all its 'domestic' public spending. For foreign affairs and defence it was suggested it would pay an annual contribution to the UK Treasury for these shared services. The Scotland Bill proposes no such thing however. It is a rather rehash of the limp proposal drafted in the immediate aftermath of the referendum. The Green and SNP negotiators accepted 'surrender terms' drawn up by the Tories. But that was a long time ago and the political terrain in Scotland has 'changed utterly' since then. Nonetheless, the Tory Government and Labour's sole representative North of the Border insist Smith is implemented in full.

SNP split

The SNP on the other hand is split on the Scotland Bill. It obviously signed up to and supported it at the 'Smith stage' but now that it has 95 per cent of Scotland's MPs, it is desperately trying to get out of it. The trouble is they will now appear to reject extra powers for Holyrood and since they are in a 10:1 minority at Westminster, the Bill will be forced through.

They will therefore find themselves voting against more powers for the Scottish Parliament. But they must because it is a 'Trojan horse', one the Cuthberts suggest could eat a huge hole in Scotland's economic and political coffers.

by Bill Bonnar

Turkish election: a victory for democrats and progressives

THE FAILURE of Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan to win an overall majority in elections to the Grand National Assembly on 8 June will be counted as a victory for democratic and progressive forces in that country.

His Justice and Development Party, which has governed Turkey since 2002 gained 41 per cent of the vote; not enough to push through contentious constitutional changes which would have taken the country in a more authoritarian direction.

The social democratic Republican Peoples Party gained 25 per cent of the vote with the People's Democratic Party gaining around 13 per cent.

The PDP draws its support primarily from the Kurdish minority although has extended its support to many non-Kurds attracted by their defence of secularism, support for women's rights and a markedly left of centre social and economic programme.

More worrying was the performance of the overtly fascist National Movement Party which came third with 16 per cent of the vote. Sometimes called the Nationalist Action Party it is a synthesis of ethnic nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism with a highly violent track record.

This includes a paramilitary wing called the Grey Wolves which carried out numerous political assassinations in the 1970s and '80s and which has been blamed for much of the violence that accompanied this election.

State-sponsored violence

The failure to achieve an overall majority was fuelled by growing economic problems and a widening division between rich and poor, major corruption scandals involving government officials and concerns over media censorship.

Apart from the activities of groups like the Grey Wolves there has been a rise in what many see as state-sponsored violence with security forces often acting with impunity.

The election was marked by violence and tension with four members of the Republican Peoples Party killed in bomb explosions just days before the vote. In 2013 the government used massive force to drive protesters from Gezi Park in Istanbul in a generalised crackdown on all dissent.

There has also been an erosion of the country's strong tradition of secularism as Erdogan has increasingly leaned towards conservative Islamic forces for support. This is particularly true of women's rights which



PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY: the PDP, which draws its support primarily from the Kurdish minority, saw big gains

have been steadily eroded in recent years. The election was also dominated by international issues including Turkey's role in the conflict in Syria and the ongoing issue of the Kurds. Turkey shared a major border with Syria and has actively intervened in favour of anti-Assad rebel groups; some of which are headquartered in Istanbul.

This support has included the creation of safe zones inside the Turkish border, military supplies and direct military intervention. Turkey is part of an international alliance against the regime in Damascus along with Saudi Arabia.

Many in Turkey have questioned the government's role blaming it for helping to destabilise the country when it should be promoting peace. The Kurdish issue remains one of the central issues of modern Turkey. Kurds make up an estimated 15-20 per cent of the population mostly in the east and south around what most call Kurdistan.

Throughout modern history the Kurds have faced violence and discrimination by a state which has consistently refused to recognise their separate identity. In 1937-38 a process of Turkification took place in which 70,000 Kurds were killed by security forces and hundreds of thousands forced into exile.

Throughout the 1990's a similar drive saw the destruction of 3000 Kurdish villages and an estimated 400,000 Kurds relocated 'for their own protection'. Today Kurds face discrimination, lack basic civil rights and are

subjected to regular repression at the hands of the security forces. Not surprisingly this has created a backlash with the emergence of an armed struggle, led by the PKK, against Turkish rule and for the establishment of a Kurdish state extending well beyond the borders of present day Turkey.

Founded in 1978 by the Kurdistan Worker's Party the PKK launched a major uprising in 1984; an armed struggle which has continued to this day although with periodic ceasefires to allow negotiations.

Ethnic nationalism

The PKK claim to have around 8000 full time guerrillas and up to 20,000 part time fighters spread throughout the region but particularly in Turkey and Iraq. For the Kurdish people the overall demand is either for independence or substantial home rule possibly leading to independence. Since the uprising of 1984 it is estimated that around 40,000 people have been killed; mostly Kurds at the hands of Turkish security forces.

For the left in Turkey, the issues in the election were clear. To defend the country's secular constitution and resist the twin threats of islamification and ethnic nationalism. To argue for a social and economic programme which would tackle poverty; inequality and corruption; to create a just settlement for the country's Kurdish minority and for Turkey to play a constructive role as peacemaker in the wider conflicts in the region.

by Calum Martin

AGAINST THE backdrop of the new Scottish Government Tax Commission and fast-approaching Holyrood and local elections in 2016 and 2017, there is the prospect of a new opportunity to address one of the worst tax policies in Scotland: the Council Tax.

The Council Tax is an extremely regressive tax policy, a fact which betrays its origins as the replacement offered by John Major's Conservative government after the defeat of Margaret Thatcher's Poll Tax, and every step of the way the SSP will be advocating its replacement with the Scottish Service Tax.

Burden on the poor

The Council Tax places a burden on the working class and low income families and households which is, proportionately, much higher than the contribution made by the rich. Whilst over recent years, the wage

gap between the highest earning 10 per cent and the lowest earning 10 per cent has risen to a ratio as high as 15:1 in many parts of the UK, (this is even more extreme if we take the top earners within that higher 10 per cent, and consider too the gender pay gap), the Council Tax fixes the tax differential as around 3:1.

Even though the richest 10 per cent have on average an income at least 15 times higher than, the law says they will never pay more than three times as much.

The percentage of income paid in Council Tax by the richest, is but a fraction of the percentage paid by the poorest. Whilst the Council Tax claims 5.2 per cent of total income for the lowest-earning 20 per cent, the

Time to Axe the Council Tax!

The case for the Scottish Service Tax



richest 20 per cent contribute only 1.7 per cent of their income through the Council Tax. Against the backdrop of the cost of living crisis, this can be devastating. In 2005 the Citizen's Advice Bureau published statistics that 25 per cent of all debt related cases they assisted with involved Council Tax debt, rising to nearly 33 per cent by 2009.

Redistribute wealth

The Council Tax must go, but there is a model, advocated by the Scottish Socialist Party that is not just designed to replace it, but one that is specifically designed to use the principles of progressive taxation to actively redistribute wealth in favour of Scotland's working class majority. This is the Scottish Service Tax (see table).

Under the Scottish Service Tax, around 77 per cent of

households would find their tax bills fall, by up to £30 a month in some cases, whilst the tax revenue for local government would rise from £2billion, plus a subsidy from Holyrood to match the Council Tax Freeze of nearly £0.6billion, to a grand total that nears £4billion, cancelling out the justifications used by other parties for their local government cuts. This would mean that hard-pressed wages go further, whilst essential public services can see greater protection.

The Scottish Service Tax is therefore a concrete, costed policy, entirely within the remit of Holyrood's powers that uses progressive taxation to actively redistribute wealth and fight cuts.

It's time to "Axe the Council Tax", and actively tackle inequality in doing so. It's time for the Scottish Service Tax.

Scottish Service Tax explained:

THE PROVISIONS of the Scottish Service Tax are both simple and effective. Unlike the Council Tax, the Scottish Service Tax sets bills that are fundamentally based upon your ability to pay, and taxes income through six bandings as incomes grow higher. These bandings are carefully established to be well spread across income bandings at a fair and balanced rate.

The tax bandings proposed are as follows:

- The first £0-£10,000 would go tax free
- Income between £10,000 and £30,000 would be taxed at 4.5 per cent
- Income between £30,000 and £40,000 would be taxed at 15 per cent
- Income between £40,000 and £50,000 would be taxed at 18 per cent
- Income between £50,000 and £90,000 would be taxed at 21 per cent
- Income above £90,000 would be taxed at 23 per cent

For example, on an income of £25,000 a year, the first £10,000 would be under Band 1, tax-free. The following £15,000 would be under Band 2, giving a total bill of £675 each year. Alternatively, on an income of £32,000 a year, the first £10,000 would again be tax-free. The following £20,000 would be under Band 2, giving £900 of tax, with the final £2,000 coming under Band 3, equating £300 of tax, giving a total annual bill of £1,200.