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THE NEW CZARS OF BRUTAL MONEY

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by Ken Ferguson

From Athens to London: elites entrench rich minority rule

THE BRUTAL crushing of the Greek people by the unelected Troika heaps further economic misery on them in order to sustain a neoliberal economic order whose central aim is to reverse the post-war gains in welfare won by workers and to secure the power of the fabulously rich to stay that way.

Behind the soul searching about the supposed “surrender” of the Syriza government lies the unavoidable reality that a largely demobilised working class and progressive movement across the continent has offered little in the way of serious opposition to the attacks on welfare and workers.

This has left the way clear for Merkel and Schäuble, Cameron and Osborne to launch all-out war on these gains, as they build a Europe secure for big capital.

In Greece, Schäuble, who oversaw the destruction of East German industry after the fall of the GDR 25 years ago, is now forcing the sell off of Greek state assets including ports, railways, utilities—and in the land of their birth—even the Olympic sites.

This will both enrich the capitalist speculators who snap them up for pence and make any future move away from a marketised system much more difficult.

Handwringing

Of course, there has been plenty of verbal and written handwringing from the left about the errors of Syriza but perhaps this should be tempered with a little humility.

In country after country, the traditional social democratic parties such as British Labour, German SPD or Spain's PSOE have been willing supporters of the austerity fiction which is the cutting edge of a determined drive to turn Europe into a low pay, casualised



MERKEL AND SCHÄUBLE:
Schäuble is forcing the sell off of Greek state assets including ports, railways, utilities and Olympic sites

zone with vanquished workers and safety for the elite.

Here in the UK, this was dramatically underscored by the mind-boggling Labour decision, in the face of Osborne's budget attacks, to abstain from voting against them. Of course we already know that whatever the outcome of their leadership election, a majority of Labour MPs swallow the austerity myth and support the cuts.

Now the Tories are moving—with only nominal Labour opposition—to further tighten the anti-union laws to virtually make strikes illegal as they do what the ruling class do best—ruthlessly pursue the interests of their class.

In Scotland, this will inevitably pose questions for the dominant SNP which, while facing left is, as we show elsewhere in this Voice, also placating big business and the markets. Of course, there needs to be the maximum devolution of power on employment rights to Holyrood but

this needs to include repeal of the anti-union laws.

Similarly, they cannot claim the anti-austerity mantle and make large scale cuts in local council budgets and the tensions flowing from such a stance can only grow as the Osborne assault intensifies.

The moment cannot be indefinitely postponed where, faced with massive cuts, the SNP in Holyrood and Westminster will have to decide between defiance and resistance or a replay of Labour's ‘vote against then do what you are told’ approach.

What is undeniable is that across Europe capitalists are using the crisis to move decisively to shape policies which protect their power at the expense of democratic rights, wages and welfare with Cameron and Merkel leading the charge.

In this decisive moment the Labour and progressive movement has—in the words of the Internationale—to “arise from your slumbers” and construct

a fighting alternative to the rampant power of the elites.

Here in Scotland, that must mean firstly holding the SNP to its public anti-austerity pledges and demanding more than fine speeches and musical chairs in Westminster.

The power and prestige currently in the SNP's hands must be placed firmly behind the demands of those facing the brutal cuts which we examine elsewhere in this Voice. The time for balancing acts between capital and labour are over and it is time to answer the age old question—which side are you on?

For Scotland's left, the cuts avalanche gathering pace on ‘Ben Osborne’ places the urgent task of fashioning a pro-independence left challenge both defending immediate jobs and services and moving beyond market brutality, firmly on the agenda.

United movement

That is why the Voice and the SSP is working with others in the SLP to fashion a united movement which can both campaign in workplaces and communities, and raise the prospect of a pro-indy left presence in Holyrood after next May's polls.

This must also be part of a wider movement, with bodies such as STUC and a range of progressive bodies taking the lead to build on the June anti-cuts demonstration with an active ongoing campaign of resistance to cuts, sackings and the demonisation of the many by a Tory press serving the Westminster Etonian axe wielders. Time is short, the attacks are brutal and delay is not an option.

by Francis McCafferty

IRISH ANTI-WATER CHARGE PROTESTORS STAND FIRM

A WIDESPREAD boycott of water charges is underway in Ireland with official figures revealing that less than half of households have paid controversial new charges introduced earlier this year. Only 675,000 households paid the first quarterly charge out of a total of up to 1.8 million.

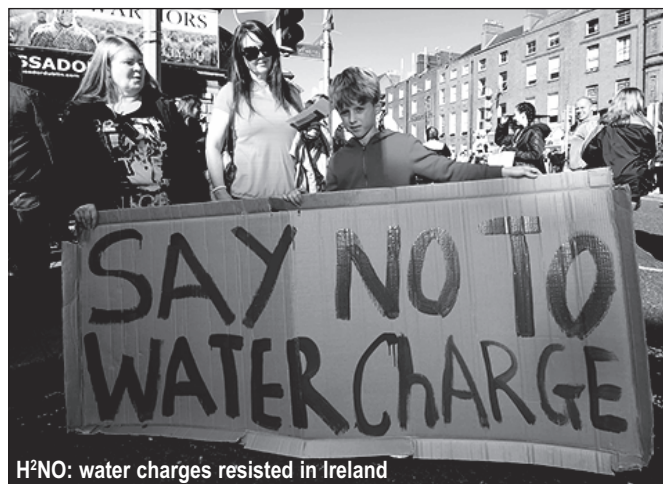
The payment figures had been continuously delayed by Irish Water, the new body set up to administer the water service and introduce the charges, precisely because it was confirmation of what many had expected after a tumultuous year of protests.

In October last year, 100,000 marched in Dublin, followed in November by an estimated 250,000 which took part in local marches the length and breadth of the country and in December up to 120,000 again brought Dublin to a standstill. The scale of the protests and the potential scale of non-payment forced the government to cut the rate of the charges and push back the billing date by three months. The backlash has been such that it is now impossible to find a public figure openly supporting the privatisation of the water supply. Protests have continued on a smaller, more local basis with demonstrations of several thousands in places like Cork, Limerick, Galway and Letterkenny.

Garda presence

The programme of water meter installations has been severely hampered by local protests in housing estates, with a strong Garda presence being required in many areas to force the installations to proceed.

The hope of the government was that the energy of the protests would dissipate given time and that the concessions they had offered would be enough to win 'middle Ireland' away from the protesters. Increasingly vitriolic attacks on 'extremists', coupled with a number of arrests of leading activists were designed to split the anti-water charges movement by



identifying and demonising a 'hard-line' element in the public mind, in particular those who are actively calling for a boycott of the charges, but the non-payment figures have shown that the government are losing hands down.

To many outside Ireland, it is slightly bewildering that having taken so many years of austerity without protest, the Irish people are now in open revolt against charges which are the norm in practically every other developed country. But the revolt on the charges is a reaction to the seven years of austerity imposed first by the Fianna Fail government and then by the Fine Gael/Labour coalition government.

In particular there was widespread, simmering resentment that the government had succeeded in forcing through a new Property Tax in the teeth of a similar revolt in the previous years. Initially called the Household Charge and collected by local authorities, it had been the subject of another huge boycott, despite the threat of fines of up to €3,000 for non-registration.

It was quickly replaced by the Local Property Tax which was administered centrally by the Revenue. The fear of Revenue with the power to make direct deductions was pervasive and

people paid up through gritted teeth. The boycott collapsed.

There is also widespread resentment that the Water Charges and Property Tax were imposed as part of the bailout deal with the 'Troika'—the European Central Bank, IMF and European Commission—following the collapse of the banking system, with the Irish people saddled with a debt of €65 billion.

Not a single extra job or service has been provided by the Property Tax. While 40 per cent of our water supply is wasted in leaks in the system (a figure the government accepts as accurate), all the effort and investment instead goes into meter installation to 'moneitise' our water supply.

That is why the anti-water charges movement characterises the new charges as 'bailout taxes'. When the government says we must pay for services, there is a widespread understanding that we do already pay through central taxation, that we will not pay twice.

It is widely expected that there will be a general election later this year. While support for Fine Gael, the conservative major coalition party, is holding up, Labour stands to take a hammering, having opposed the austerity programme of the previous Fianna Fail govern-

ment and having specifically opposed water charges. Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) Joan Burton, the leader of the Labour Party, has become a hate-figure because of her staunch defence of austerity measures and the venom with which she has attacked the protests, at one point complaining about protesters 'expensive' camera phones. Opinion polls suggest that the days of alternating governments dominated by the two conservative parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, are gone with Independents and small parties, taking up to 27 per cent. Most, but by no means all of these, lean to the left.

Pressure from the left

Sinn Féin will also do well but are under increasing pressure from the growth of the left, having lost the Dublin South West by-election late last year to the Anti-Austerity Alliance after leading party figures announced they would be paying their water charges.

They have since reversed that position but still avoid explicit support for the boycott. The most important political change is that hundreds of thousands of Irish people have got involved in protests for the first time in their lives and have been led to question the system that insists that faceless bondholders be paid back every single cent of their bad bets while even those who have lost their jobs in the crisis have to fund them through new charges and taxes.

By maintaining the boycott we will ensure that whatever complexion the next government takes, they will have only one option when it comes to water charges and that is to abolish them.

• *Francis is a member of Can't Pay Won't Pay, an independent campaign in Donegal/North Leitrim*

NUJ Scottish Organiser **Paul Holleran** outlines the union's campaign on the future of the BBC

THE NUJ has launched a new campaign with the sexy title of 'The BBC - Love It Or Lose It'.

Preparing for an intense battle, the union is urging activists to engage with the five consultations on the future of the world's largest and best known Public Service Broadcaster.

The consultations will cover issues like the Charter Renewal and licence fee as well as a review of local radio local news programming. Petitions set up by BECTU (Love-it-or-lose-it-save-the-bbc) and 38 Degrees (Protect Our BBC) are circulating, seeking public and trade union support.

Along with other sister unions in the Federation of Entertainment Unions public meetings and lobbying events are planned to highlight the "quality journalism and investigations breaking stories around the world".

Review

The Scottish committee of the Federation of Entertainment Unions has already started its own review working on briefing papers aimed at the public and politicians. We realise the situation is not as simple north of the border and a different battle needs to accompany the wider arguments to protect public service broadcasting.

There is a real need to develop constructive proposals aimed at changing the BBC as part of our armoury.

The battlefield is wide, the opponents are varied but the challenge and potential prize is a BBC that meets the desires and needs of the public in these nations and regions. Our aspirations are for:

We need a BBC which meets the desires and needs of the public

- a more responsive, transparent BBC, with directors held accountable at an AGM and elections
- reform of the BBC Trust with one third elected by licence fee payers and a further third elected by BBC workforce including staff representation on the Trust
- an increased funding solution including an alternative to the licence fee designed on affordability

A battle needs to be won against the boycott or non-payment of the licence fee in the meantime with a convincing set of arguments and firm proposals which restores lost public trust. It is not just the Murdoch regime or right wing media like the *Daily Mail*, who see the BBC as a "left wing bastion of the public service sector", who are seeking the demise of the organisation. There is now a sizeable minority who certainly do not love the BBC and who are not bothered a jot if they "lose it".

Many people in Scotland actively dislike the BBC. They do not trust it and are not shy of using social media to tell the world what they think.

They see it as a voice of the establishment, with many feeling strongly enough to demonstrate outside BBC offices on several occasions last year.

In mitigation, the NUJ has pointed out that there has been serious problems with mis-management in BBC Scotland for some time.

Devastating cuts to the workforce over a five year period, in the region of 30 per cent, has left programmes understaffed and under-resourced, with audiences short changed in terms of quality.

Senior figures in the BBC have now admitted the mistakes of front loading job losses in the lead up to 2014.

That was of course the most significant year for some considerable time in respect of major events happening in Scotland.

- The Ryder Cup in Perth one of the most important international golfing events in the calendar
- Cameron's crazy celebration of the start of the First World War in Stirling
- The Commonwealth Games in Glasgow
- And of course the independence referendum—one of the most important political campaigns for hundreds of years, which was treated as run of the mill election by John Boothman, the head of news and current affairs, making widespread job cuts in his department across Scotland and hiring 16 or so staff to compensate for that earlier loss.

Constant conflict

There was wholesale opposition within the unions over this approach, with industrial action and constant conflict within the Pacific Quay HQ as staff were overstretched and undermined.

Staff were also disgusted in the lack of management response to the criticisms faced by journalists and programme makers, with no one standing up and explaining their position or challenging accusations of bias and engaging with the many members of the public unhappy with the coverage.

Since then, there has been a certain amount of recognition of the mistakes made, including the recent removal of the head of news and current affairs. But we still believe there should be a review carried out to learn lessons from the referendum campaign and 2015 general election coverage, well before the start of the 2016 Scottish elections and any 'in-out' European referendum.

The NUJ reps and officials have met with politicians at Westminster and Holyrood to open up a dialogue on the future of the BBC. The response has been really constructive, particularly as there are a fair proportion of SNP MPs with some link to broadcasting or the media in their previous jobs.

A mature, in depth review is now required with a wide dialogue involving all parts of the media in Scotland, including 'new-social media'. The political parties need to be involved as well as the public.

The first question should be what model do you want? A reformed, well resourced BBC, or an alternative resembling Fox News UK?

by John McAllion

THE YOUNGOV poll showing Jeremy Corbyn on track to become Labour's next leader caused widespread panic across the party's establishment and parliamentary leadership.

The three other centrist candidates in the contest immediately fell out over which of them should withdraw and throw their weight and supporters behind a single "Stop Corbyn" candidate. Party insiders bemoaned the "moron" MPs who had nominated Corbyn in the first place.

One of Labour's biggest donors warned that if Corbyn wins wealthy supporters will turn away from the party and support the kind of political split that led to the formation of the rival SDP in the 1980s.

Blair and Mandelson—the self-proclaimed architects of New Labour's three successive election victories after 1997—were also wheeled out to warn of the dire consequences of a Corbyn victory.

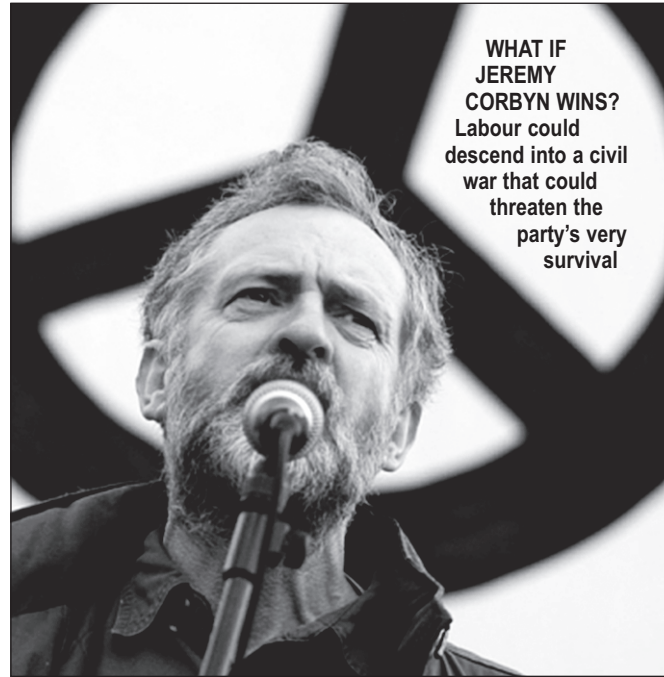
Blair argued that Corbyn was the Labour leader the Tories preferred and that any party members who in their hearts still supported traditional socialist tax and spend policies needed a transplant.

Arch-modernisers

Lord Mandelson believed a Corbyn win threatened Labour's future as a viable party of government. His fellow arch-moderniser and former New Labour Health Secretary Alan Milburn warned that any lurch to the left would show Labour "has a death-wish".

The ferocity of the reaction to the YouGov poll suggests that in the event of Corbyn becoming the next leader, Labour might descend into a civil war that could threaten the party's very survival. If that were to happen, the Tories would then be the big winners. They are already planning boundary changes that will give them an in-built electoral advantage over Labour at the

CORBYN LEADERSHIP BID FACES THE IMPLACABLE HOSTILITY OF LABOUR'S WESTMINSTER ELITE



next general election. If the largest party of opposition were to spend the years running up to that election indulging in destructive and introspective infighting, the way would be open for a succession of Tory general election victories. The big losers inevitably would be the workers left at the mercy of Tory rule.

Of course, such a doomsday scenario need not come to pass. All that is required is for the parliamentary elite to accept the democratic decision of their party membership. If, as they claim, they really do support one-person-one-vote, then it is their democratic duty to rally behind whichever leader is elected by that process.

The centrist MPs who nominated Corbyn to ensure that his anti-austerity politics were part of the leadership debate, cannot now object if his kind of politics ultimately prevail with Labour members and supporters.

Democracy means accepting the will of the electorate, espe-

cially when you disagree with their decision. However, the quality of Labour Party democracy has never been that simple.

It has always been complicated by the differing roles and different political weight given to the trade unions, party members, National Executive Committee, Conference, an autonomous Parliamentary Labour Party and the Leadership of that parliamentary party.

For almost all of its history, it has been the parliamentary leadership that has dominated Labour's policy-making process. This is what lies at the root of the conundrum that Labour policies are often opposed by the bulk of its own membership. With the arrival of one-person-one-vote and with the prospect of a Corbyn leadership, that dominance could now be coming to an end.

Corbyn's politics are diametrically opposed to those of the parliamentary leadership and the bulk of the parliamentary party. They dismiss his anti-austerity

platform as deficit denial. His opposition to NATO and Trident is viewed by them as bordering on treason. His hostility to American imperialism they see as a threat to the so-called UK/USA special relationship.

His support for the Palestinians horrifies the Labour Friends of Israel who dominate on the opposition benches. His advocacy of public ownership and of the dismantling of anti-trade union laws they dismiss as a throwback to the dinosaur politics of the 1980s.

If Jeremy does win, it is difficult to see how the political gulf that separates him from the majority of MPs he will then lead can ever be successfully closed.

Labour parliamentarians have traditionally tolerated a dissident left within their ranks because that left never seriously threatened to take over control of the parliamentary party or of Labour governments.

No socialist intent

The Labour left provided useful socialist cover for Westminster politicians who had no intention of following a socialist course of action. Suddenly, on the back of a genuine one-member-one-vote election, Labour members are openly in revolt against the austerity that is the common sense of the majority of Westminster Labour MPs.

A Corbyn victory will threaten Labour's long established role of securing working class collaboration in the continuance of government by the few over the many.

The party's parliamentary elite will have the support of the entire Westminster establishment and of the on-side print and broadcast media to ensure that it never comes to pass. Watch this space.

by *Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace
organiser*

OSBORNE'S LIES CLOAK ALL-OUT CLASS WAR

IT SHOULD come as no surprise, but Tory Chancellor George Osborne is not only a thief but a brazen liar.

The headline-grabbing talk of a 'National Living Wage' is a cynical attempt to throw dust in people's eyes, to blind them to the Tories' theft of incomes from low-paid workers, young people and parents with the audacity to have more than two children.

Behind all the recent bullshit about the Tories being 'the party of working people', One Nation Tories, leaps out a Budget that makes the bankers, billionaires and big business even more bloated in their opulence, by robbing the rest of us. It's undiluted class war, disguised by the confusing guff about 'a National Living Wage'.

Before dealing with the issue of wages, let's glance at a few features of this first Tory Budget since 1996.

Winners and losers

First, some of the winners. Corporation Tax on big business was 28 per cent in 2010, when Osborne first took up his rent-free residence in No 11 Downing Street.

Now it's set to plummet to 18 per cent, the lowest business tax in any country in the western world. By contrast, for example, German corporations are taxed at 30 per cent; those in France 33.3 per cent; and 40 per cent in the USA.

Even before this bounty to big business, analysts at the University of York have shown that in 2012-13 the government gifted big business £58.2billion in subsidies, grants and Corporation Tax benefits—whilst only getting in £41.3billion in Corporation Tax that year.

Now Osborne is set to give big business £93billion in such handouts. That means every house-

hold has been forced to pay—without even being asked their leave to do so—an average of £3,500 in subsidies for big corporations. And the winners include many Corporation Tax-Dodgers.

Another major set of winners are those in receipt of inherited properties worth £1million without having to fork out any Inheritance Tax. One figure quoted is that 26,000 such estates gain a giant £2.5billion.

Nor were Tory pals in the City of London feel left out in their handouts to the rich: contrary to the headlines, they'll gain from the replacement of the bank levy by the less 'punitive' 8 per cent bank profits tax.

Those profiting from war and death can sleep peacefully in the knowledge Osborne has agreed to jack up defence spending to the 2 per cent of GDP demanded by NATO.

In contrast there are millions of losers—overwhelmingly the 'hard-working families' we hear such repeated, hypocritical prattling about from Tory (and Labour) politicians, especially pre-elections.

Whilst handing out £93billion to big business, the Tories are stealing £35billion from working class people in benefits—especially in-work benefits.

Over 5.3 million public sector workers—half a million of them in Scotland—have suffered pay cuts since 2010 according to

UNISON, a 3 per cent pay rise in the past five years, whilst inflation rose by 17 per cent. Now they are condemned to another four years of a 1 per cent pay cap—it a modern Ice Age for workers in the NHS, councils, education and the likes.

Disabled people deemed fit to work stand to lose £30 a week. Young people will have all their benefits withdrawn if they decline unpaid work placements. Grants for working class students are to be scrapped in favour of loans. Housing benefit is to be wiped out for people aged 18-21.

Council and housing association tenants are to be given a miserly 1 per cent cut to their rents, but if their household income is above £30,000 (and the official average wage per person last year was £27,200, don't forget) they will have to pay the full market rent.

Outstripping Herod

Nearly all working age benefits are to be frozen until 2020 and household benefit cap is to be slashed from £26,000 to £20,000.

In a measure that King Herod would have blushed and balked at implementing, the multi-millionaire Gideon Osborne is to deny any additional housing benefit, Tax Credit or Universal Credit for any more than two children.

As the Children's Commis-

sioner, Tam Baillie, was moved to comment:

"Parents and carers must feed and clothe all of their children, not just the first two. This is denying millions of children their basic human rights."

An estimated seven million children face savage cuts to their families' incomes from the overall Budget.

And Osborne's rule about 'two kids only' smacks of class hatred and a form of eugenics; only the rich are allowed to breed, it seems.

One of the biggest chunks of cuts is that suffered by low-paid workers through attacks on Tax Credits, including Working Tax Credits. A horrendous £4.5billion is to be robbed off some of the poorest-paid this year alone.

To distract and confuse those outraged at his daylight robbery of the incomes of workers, students, disabled people, young people and parents, he perpetrates the monstrous lie that "Britain needs a pay rise and Britain is getting a pay rise".

Stealing not only our incomes, but also our language, he then plays dirty, disgraceful tricks with the term 'Living Wage'.

To unmask his lies, it's useful to recap a few simple facts—which even some who hate the Tories with justified loathing don't always remember or make plain for all to see and understand.

The current National Minimum Wage is £6.50 an hour—once you're aged 21. It's set to rise to £6.70 this October.

And, crucially, it's legally enforceable.

The current Living Wage Foundation figure for a Living Wage is £7.85 an hour. It will be uprated in November. It's a huge deal better than the legal National Minimum Wage, and therefore very welcome. But it has two crucial flaws.

The best known weakness is that it's entirely voluntary, optional, not legally enforceable, left to the whims and fancies of employers. Which helps to explain why only 200 employers in Scotland have volunteered to sign up to be Accredited Living Wage Employers, most of them smaller employers, affecting only a tiny minority of workers. That's why the SSP has always fought for a legally enforced living minimum wage.

Not a Living Wage

The second profound weakness of the current Living Wage is known by hardly anyone! In fact it's an admission that £7.85 is not a genuine Living Wage at all. Because the figure calculated for the Living Wage Foundation is based on a very important assumption: it assumes the full uptake of all forms of in-work benefits, including Tax Credits and Housing Benefit.

Otherwise, its own authors admit, it would have to be far, far higher. To give one example of this: if it wasn't for the top-ups assumed in the Living Wage figure, today's London Living Wage would not be £9.15 but almost exactly £12-an-hour.

There's the rub, the essence of the God almighty lie perpetrated by Osborne and the Tories. It's a Biblical case of Gideon giveth, and Gideon taketh away! Osborne manufactured media headlines—in a masterly distraction ploy from his slaughter of benefits and



FAULTY POWERS: don't mention the class war...

wages—by talking of 'a National Living Wage' of £7.20 by April 2016, with "an ambition of this rising to £9 by 2020". None of the media seems to mention that weasel phrase "an ambition".

But leaving that for now, one key point is that £7.20 next April is a mere 50p up on the impending National Minimum Wage, in itself derisory.

Furthermore it is well below the current 'Living Wage' of £7.85, even before that is uprated this November.

Perhaps most telling of all, it disguises the theft of Tax Credits which will mean low-paid workers will lose, not gain, from Osborne's sham 'National Living Wage'.

To quote a few initial calculations by various economists in the wake of the Budget baloney about "Britain getting a pay rise".

A couple, with two kids, both working full-time on the current £6.50 minimum wage would gain £1,560 in wages, but lose £2,200 in Tax Credits.

Two workers, both earning £9.25 an hour, with two kids, would be £850 a year worse off.

A family with two at work, currently earning £20,000, would have a fall in their income of £2,057 a year.

A single parent now earning a pathetic £10,000 would lose £1,455 of that under Osborne's deceitful package.

And those are just sample figures for workers who qualify by being aged 25 or more!

Over two million workers under the age of 25 are to be denied the Tories' bountiful 'increase'—but will be hammered, like older workers, by cuts to Tax Credits. Far from being a recipe for 'a high wage econ-

omy', this Budget is amongst other things a recipe for replacement of older workers by those under 25 as a source of dirt-cheap labour.

The Scottish Socialist Party has never favoured a pathetically low, legal national minimum wage.

Nor have we restricted our fight to support for a voluntary, unenforceable 'Living Wage'—especially one which is not actually a genuine living wage at all, since it depends on top-ups, which in turn come out of the pockets of workers' taxes.

Since our formation, the SSP has demanded a decent living minimum wage, legally enforced, based on the formula of two-thirds male median earnings. I've expanded on this case in many previous articles. In 2015 figures that means we demand a national minimum wage of £10, here and now.

£10-an-hour for all

And critically, the SSP's demand has always been that this applies to all workers and apprentices aged 16 and over.

Not the over-21s as applies now. Not the over-25s as Osborne plans. And not accompanied by cuts to in-work benefits.

The fact is, a £10 minimum, right now in 2015, not five years hence, would constitute a genuine living income, and is the level required to remove reliance on state top-ups, which constitute a £30billion annual subsidy to bosses who pay their workers peanuts in pursuit of ever-higher profits.

The trade union movement and socialists need to cut through the crap perpetrated by the Tories on this issue, and mobilise workers in struggle for a living minimum wage of £10 now, for all over 16, with equal pay for women.

The Budget signals bitter class war by the rich it represents. But it should also put fire in our bellies and steel in our resolve to fight back.

SANDRA WEBSTER

HUMAN STORIES BEHIND THE BUDGET NIGHTMARE

by Sandra Webster,
SSP national co-spokesperson

WHEN THE “emergency” budget was announced by the Tories, all of us were filled with expectations of dread. We knew it was an emergency for those of us who have the most to lose and are at the mercy of Tory ideology and cuts. This was a budget designed to reward those who voted Tory and to punish the poor for the crime of being poor. This will hugely impact those we know and care for.

Here we look behind the headlines and hear the voices of three ordinary people who will be affected.

‘Jane’ had a lifelong award for DLA due to a serious illness. Recently her health deteriorated and she had a leg amputated. She had to apply for PIP also known as personal independence payment.

Although she received the mobility component, she went from the middle rate of care to none at all. The reason given was she had aids and adaptations that allow her to cook. All she has is a stool and a microwave.

Uncaring conservatism

The assessor said she was able to concentrate enough to manage her own medicine.

She was only able to do this on the day as her friend and informal carer was there to support her.

Despite her illness ‘Jane’ has managed to work and finds personal satisfaction in her career. She says:

“I have worked most of my life and I

thought I would get the help when I needed it.

“[Jean] my pal cooks my meals and cleans my house as I can’t manage it. I can’t understand why they have taken the care away from me.”

PIP is now being rolled out thanks to another five years of guaranteed Tory misrule. ESA is also changing.

Those deemed fit for work will only receive the same rate as Jobseekers Allowance. Although it is for new claims.

It seems likely that many will be reassessed. Everyone with a life award of DLA will be assessed soon too. Who will protect the most vulnerable?

Owen is 17, turning eighteen in a couple of months. He lives with his mum Clare. He has just left school and is still looking for further education or a job. Clare lives with rheumatoid arthritis and depends a lot on Owen.

At the moment she receives tax credits for him but she knows they will be stopping imminently. She is also in receipt of severe disability allowance but knows with Owen becoming an adult in the eyes of the state she will lose this payment too as she is deemed as living with another adult.

The only reason I know this is that it happened to my pal.

“One day your boy is a child the next he is an adult within one day? I think I will lose my Council Tax single adult discount too.

“It’s frightening. We’ll get by but it is going to be hard. I worry for Owen what kind of future does he have?”

“Owen is full of ideas for his future.

:He would like to be a motor mechanic but he worries about his mum too. He thinks the government new rules will affect him and his friends.

“We have to get a job or learn or get no benefits. I am going to have to stay with my mum for the next few years at least until I am twenty one.

“I feel guilty because I know she is going to lose a lot of money so I will apply for carer’s allowance which means I can’t work or go to college for more than 16 hours a week.

“Some of my pals will have no money though. How are they meant to survive?”

Two different families who will be hugely impacted by the welfare cuts along with thousands of others. Including the hard working families who Labour and the Tories claim to represent.

Their budget - not ours

Of course, for the Tories, this now means hard working families with two or less children.

Malthusian politics for a party driven by an ideology that being poor is the individual’s fault, not the circumstances that they find themselves in.

The emergency now is for those we represent. We need to build solidarity against a divide and conquer system that attacks the individual making them feel powerless.

While the Tories were gloating over the content of their budget, we were watching and remembering. This is their budget, not ours. Let’s prepare for what lies ahead and support everyone affected.



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by Colin Fox, SSP national co-spokesperson

Scotland needs a decisive break with capitalist greed

IT SEEMS a long time since the financial crash of 2008 pushed Scotland into its worst recession in 80 years.

So where did the ‘recovery’ come from? Frederick Engels, the great marxist intellectual, pointed out that capitalism only escapes its economic recessions by attacking further the living standards of the working class.

Professor David Harvey of New York City University argues capitalism survived the 2008 collapse by record borrowing on the money markets on the one hand and lowering real wages and working conditions on the other.

And the borrowing will be repaid through cuts in the living standards of the working class majority. Britain’s ‘recovery’ and subsequent pitiful productivity rates for example can be traced, says Harvey, to the prevalence of low wage, low skilled, casual jobs created since 2008.

The UK national debt stands today at £1.56trillion or 81.58 per cent of GDP and government austerity is designed to hammer the living standards of those in receipt of state benefits such as tax credits and family allowance.

Insecure workforce

Employers may hold the upper hand thanks to draconian anti-union laws and the widespread insecurity felt by their workforce. But to misinterpret the acquiescence of the workforce and society as a whole as support for neoliberalism and the status quo would be a serious mistake.

Jeremy Corbyn’s remarkable support in the Labour leadership election offers but one example of the widespread resentment at the economic and political status quo. And there are others. The Yes vote in the independence referendum was one. The SNP’s general election triumph another.

And the SNP will not be immune from this resentment despite enjoying the most successful



STURGEON AND SWINNEY – BIG BUSINESS AS USUAL: the SNP give Ineos boss Jim Ratcliffe a “cast iron assurance” that he can frack until his heart is content

period in its 80 year history. The latest polls put them on course for another win in next years Holyrood elections. But they should be wary. The nationalists are fast becoming the Scottish ‘establishment’ and their political programme, described by the eminent economists Jim and Margaret Cuthbert in this newspaper, as “neoliberalism with a heart” is deeply conservative.

They position themselves as a ‘social democratic left of centre party’ when they are in fact right of centre on economic policy.

But they face the same contradictions all other social democratic parties in the world today. They promise reforms in a counter-reformist epoch.

In other words this is not a period where capitalism is conceding reforms to working people rather it is a period when earlier concessions are being taken back.

And the problems this poses for the SNP are both profound and obvious. They cannot serve two masters.

The Herald pointed out last week for example that the SNP government at Holyrood have given Jim Ratcliffe of Ineos a “cast iron assurance” that he can frack until his heart is content near his giant Grangemouth petrochemical site. For they are desperate to reassure neoliberal corporate capitalism—in whom they believe all power resides—they are ‘open for business’.

But this is the same SNP who court public opinion and display lapel badges reading ‘Frack Off’.

They have promised the same corporate interests they will not rescind the Western world’s worst anti-union legislation or allow working people a level playing field in industrial relations. On austerity the SNP also face both ways at once. Observers will notice how Nicola Sturgeon chooses her words carefully on the subject, insisting: “the SNP opposes austerity on this scale at this time.”

Words are important in politics. What she is actually saying here is that she favours cuts in

public spending on another scale at another time. And that is precisely what SNP councils and the Holyrood administration has done for the past eight years. They sold off Edinburgh’s new Sick Kids Hospital to private developers for example under the ‘Scottish Futures Trust’.

Their record in standing up for working people leaves a great deal to be desired. In almost 20 years the SSP has never voted for cuts, privatisation or neoliberal economics, not once.

Unlike the SNP and Labour the SSP are not social democrats. We are socialists. We know the difference. And it is profound.

Ours is a party that opposes private ownership and control of industry, production, distribution and exchange. We prefer public ownership and recognise the profound advantages as well as the political conflict between capital and labour, between money and democracy.

Better system

We aim to replace the bosses’ system driven by greed with a better one based on fulfilling the fundamental needs of every citizen.

So how is that change to occur? Simply put, those with no vested interest in the status quo will affect change. And that force is the organised working class, the people Marx described as capitalism’s “gravediggers”.

These issues will be discussed at the Scottish Left Project launch on Saturday 29 August in the Marriott Hotel in Glasgow. All SSP supporters are urged to come along, raise the party’s ideas and engage in the discussions that will take place there about the left’s challenge to the SNP, neoliberalism and the way forward for the socialist movement in Scotland.

AUSTERITY: A VERY NEOLIBERAL COUP

by Fraser Coats

IN WHAT must rank as one of the great propaganda achievements, the great majority of voters in May's UK general election—the 88 per cent who opted for the Tories, Labour, Lib Dem and UKIP—voted for a set of economic policies that in order for them to be imposed on Chile in 1973, the democratically elected government had to be literally bombed out of office, a military dictatorship installed, political opponents rounded up, tortured and killed, trade union leaders jailed, shot and 'disappeared', and all university economics departments that taught anything other than the neoliberal method, shut down.

Thatcher and Reagan's embracing of Pinochet's blueprint in the '80s, lent it international credibility and so successfully has the Chicago School gospel been spread since—and the debate around alternative economic strategies closed down—that it has become a global axiom; "There is no alternative" as Thatcher said.

Rampage

The resultant deregulated banking sector, unleashed to rampage its way through economy after economy, reached a conclusion that was as disastrous as it was inevitable with the collapse of the economic and financial system in 2008. Far from being unforeseen, as the mainstream narrative would have it, the crash was in fact widely foreseen and warned against by political leaders such as Fidel Castro, and economists like Steve Keen and Michael Hudson.

But just as we bought the lie that the days of boom and bust were over, so we are invited to believe another; that having transferred the debts of an inherently unstable system onto the public balance sheet, austerity for the people is necessary to reduce the



WINNER TAKES IT ALL:
austerity is a carefully
calculated plan to
concentrate ever more
wealth into the hands of
a tiny elite, by whatever
means necessary

annual budget deficit as a means of tackling that debt.

In other words the debt can and must be paid by reducing living standards. This is the theory that most economists, almost all politicians and media, Labour and social democratic parties throughout the world, and 88 per cent of the UK's voting public have fallen for. And it is the most dangerous lie of our time.

For thousands of years, from Babylonian times to America under British rule to post-second world war Germany to the Brady Plan in South America, the successful solution to debt crisis, as described by no less a radical than Adam Smith, has involved writing debts down to the ability to pay or out and out cancellation.

And recession has been countered not by reducing the annual deficit but by increasing it in order to invest in jobs, infrastructure and public services, which in turn restores the purchasing power needed to return the economy to health. The creation of the welfare state here and the New Deal in America were just such successful responses to crisis.

But the dogma of austerity, specifically designed to do the

opposite, dictates that the hedge funds must be replenished, the reckless loans guaranteed, the losing bets refunded and the seven-figure salaries and bonuses secured, the cost of this bailout to be recouped by cutting jobs, driving down wages, smashing the trade unions, raiding pension funds, destroying public services and sanctioning or preferably abolishing benefits; in short a class-driven strategy which destroys the spending power of ordinary people by diverting disposable income into the financial sector, thereby guaranteeing that economic shrinkage, not growth, takes place in the real economy of goods and services. A war of finance against not only the working class but uniquely, industry as well.

The extractive nature of lending is highlighted by the current so-called 'recovery', based almost entirely on the increase in house prices resulting from Help to Buy. This is Cameron's cynical nod to lenders, whose profits contribute to Gross Domestic Product and therefore give the illusion of growth, but in practice actually extract money—paid out to it in increased mortgage repayments

and interest—again from the productive economy.

The same applies to the explosion in payday loan sharks whose interest rates are often in four figures. Once we understand finance's extractive character, so we can see that rescuing the banks wasn't about saving the economy, but the parasite that leeches from it. Of course recovery is not the goal of the neoliberals but a worldwide redistribution of wealth from the bottom up, the proof of which is contained within the many reports and studies (Oxfam's last year being a recent notable example) showing just such a process to be well under way, austerity providing the perfect cover. And with the enrichment of the few comes the impoverishment of the many.

Confidence trick

We may not yet be at the same stage of economic self-destruction as Latvia, Greece or even Spain, but as sharp rises in homelessness and food bank use indicate, we are undoubtedly on the same trajectory. Reversing this trend is by far the most urgent challenge confronting the socialist and trade union movements today.

Austerity is a confidence trick, a carefully calculated—and so far highly successful—plan to concentrate ever more wealth into the hands of a tiny elite, by whatever means necessary and regardless of social cost. And in a spectacular show of solidarity, all the main UK parties have rallied round in its defence.

But it relies entirely on us believing the fiction. Only by understanding it, its ideology and the malevolent role of finance essential to it, will we be in a position to defeat the disinformation most of us have so far fallen for.

• *Fraser is chair of Airdrie & Coatbridge SSP and a member of ASLEF*

by Bill Bonnar

THERE IS a scene from one of the *Godfather* films of the early seventies featuring Al Pacino. A story is being told of how the Godfather got a film producer to give someone a role in his next production. The scene is described as follows. The producer is sitting with the contract in front of him waiting to be signed while a gangster holds a gun to his head and is told "either your signature will be on that agreement or your brains."

This was the position the Syriza government found itself when in the final round of negotiations with the EC-led Troika. Sign the agreement in front of you or we will bankrupt your country with immediate effect.

Despite a referendum in which the Greek people overwhelmingly rejected austerity and despite significant opposition within his own party; Alexander Tsipras felt he had no alternative but to sign the agreement in front of him; an agreement which will inflict more misery on the Greek people.

Division

The impact this will have on Syriza and on the mass anti-austerity movement in the country remains to be seen but clearly a division is emerging on the way forward. From the beginning Syriza has been a coalition of quite dispirit forces but now a clear left/right split is emerging although this division pre-dates the most recent events.

Over the past two years there has been two significant developments fuelling this process. One has been the spectacular rise of Syriza from radical opposition group to governing party.

The other has been the equally spectacular collapse of Pasok; traditionally the mass party of social democracy in Greece.

The decline of Pasok has few precedents in modern European history. At the election of 2009, at the start of the current crisis it

After the Troika tanks, where now for Greece and Europe?



was the largest party in the country with 44 per cent of the vote and 160 MPs.

In the European Parliament it had a significant number of MEPs while at district level it controlled most of local government. Mass membership, huge branch structure, large trade union affiliation; it was the epitome of a traditional and successful social democratic party. In the election earlier this year it poled less than 5 per cent of the vote and was reduced to just 13 MPs.

Most of its membership has left, its branch structures have collapsed, its trade unions have mostly disaffiliated and it is bankrupt.

The key question is; where have its members and voters gone? Most have gone to Syriza with the effect of moving it to the right. The aim, consciously or by default it to recreate Syriza as a kind of Pasok mark 2 establishing it as a new mass social democratic party.

This is at odds with many of those who founded the movement as a genuine left alternative. That tension between left and

right was certainly there in the run up to the last election and has come to the fore since the party has been in government.

The signing of the latest austerity package, in the face of opposition from much of the left in the party, suggests that power and influence has decisively shifted.

Intensified crisis

What will happen now? The first thing to say is that the recent agreement resolves very little.

The country remains in deep economic and social crisis; a crisis which will intensify following this latest package of austerity measures. Even within the framework of the current plan there is widespread agreement that the measures will not deliver the kind of economic progress outlined in its aims.

Politics in Greece are now becoming sharper and more intense. Syriza is trying to create a new centre ground which reluctantly accepts the austerity programme yet tries to bring in modest economic and social reforms. The aim to gradually lift the country out of recession and

create time and space for its more radical programme.

On the left an opposition is re-emerging both within Syriza and outside in the form of the KKE (Communist Party). This however is divided between those who want to push Syriza back to the left and those who want to create a left alternative. On the right, with the traditional right parties in disarray, the radical right in the form of Golden Dawn are on the march.

The next few months should prove tumultuous. One issue that has come to the fore has been the issue of Europe. The treatment of Greece at the hands of the EU has forced many on the left to re-evaluate their position on Europe.

In recent years most left parties have accepted their country's membership of the EU while arguing for a different kind of Europe. A debate is now raging throughout the European left as to whether this position is still tenable. For the past five years Greece has been in the front line in the fight against austerity across Europe. All of Europe is now watching as these events unfold.

for Socialism, Independence
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Scottish Gypsy Travellers - oppression continued

by Colin Turbett

THE VOICE has previously reported on the efforts of Scottish Gypsy Travellers and their supporters to retain their hard fought for minority ethnic status and cultural identity. Sadly, despite some progress in recent years, their identity and way of life are again under threat as another consequence of the election of a Tory government in Westminster. Hot on the heels of election victory, Kettering Tory MP Philip Hollobone initiated a debate appallingly entitled 'The effect of Gypsies and Travellers on local communities' on 10 June. He used this to repeat the age old insult that this is not a 'real community', that Gypsy Travellers should be the subject of the same planning laws as the rest of the population, and that this should all be considered alongside the planned scrapping of the Human Rights Act.

His words were echoed by other Tory MPs with only three Labour MPs, notably Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) trying to counter the racism that echoed round the chamber, pointing out the facts about health and poverty amongst these populations. Thankfully their Scottish Labour colleague Brian Donohoe, whose intolerance

would have made even the Tories blush, was booted out on 7 May. This will not go away and, after the victory of intolerance at Dale Farm four years ago, we can expect the hard line being taken by local authorities south of the border to creep into Scotland. Already Gypsy Traveller activists report that some Scottish Councils are insisting that private planning applications for siting caravans by Gypsy Travellers (who have purchased or who are renting land) will only succeed if space is made available for transient Gypsy Travellers. This is a bit like being told that you can only build a house on a certain spot, if a room is available for anyone passing by—whether or not you know them!

Whilst that might be an aspiration in a future communist society, most of us would consider it an abhorrent intrusion just now. It's not all doom and gloom however: in Aberdeenshire, a discussion about provision looks likely to result in the creation of four sites following a council sub-committee decision on 18 June. This is to be welcomed, if it actually happens—this has been running for years and years. Down in Lochgoilhead, Argyll, after a campaign by Gypsy Travellers and local people, the Gypsy Heart where

Gypsy Travellers traditionally celebrated marriage and other family events, has finally won official heritage status from Historic Scotland.

The Gypsy Heart is a very rare if fragile concrete symbol of the culture of a nomadic people who traditionally left little behind them when they moved on, and who are at risk of disappearing almost without trace. TV's *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings* has done them a huge disservice, with its focus on wealth and extravagance unknown certainly in Scotland. As a very effective but unintended counter, two photographers from Wales, Tina Carr and Annmarie Schone, have spent several years with Gypsy Traveller and Roma communities throughout the UK and in Hungary.

Their beautifully illustrated and well-informed book, much of it written by their subjects, *From the Horses Mouth*, is available from them online. This includes history from the holocaust and its impact, to the marginalisation and direct threats to these communities today. Whilst it is doubtful if Tory MPs and their more reactionary constituents would recognise these cultures, the rest of us should (and with books like this, feel able to) exercise solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Gypsy Traveller communities.

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