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by Ken Ferguson

THERE IS an old saying “nothing is new under the sun” and nowhere is this more clearly the case as in the world of politics.

With the demands and the pressures of a 24/7 news cycle and a mushrooming of social media combined with a major decline in serious journalism (examined elsewhere in this Voice) there is a ready market for “manias” of all kinds and politics is no exception.

So with today’s politics where two “manias” are competing for the attention of Scots voters from Nicola Sturgeon of the SNP and Jeremy Corbyn’s newly “socialist” Labour Party.

Both have, on first look, much that is attractive to Scotland’s left of centre politics. Both are anti-austerity and committed to social justice, collective provision and a generally progressive politics. Both have generated popular followings which make them look more like pop stars than elected politicians.

With the SNP there is no doubt that Sturgeon is a major beneficiary of the engagement and energy generated by the broad Yes movement last year. Indeed many thousands have simply taken off their Yes badges and replaced them with SNP ones and joined the party as a sort of continuity Yes campaign.

SNP council cuts

This is a major gain for the SNP as we run up to next year’s Holyrood elections, giving them a potential pool of new campaigners. But it also has its downside. The constraints of austerity will increasingly place unpalatable choices on their government, as we have already seen in local council cuts.

All the signs are that, irrespective of May’s anti-austerity pitch, the offer made to voters next May is likely to be pragmatic, based on the record of supposed success in government, and designed to defend the SNP’s majority, much of it based on No voting areas in rural Scotland.

Independence will be downplayed as an aspiration for later on and, as is already happening, the Yes movement quietly run down. This danger is already apparent with shrill cries from some parts of the SNP telling independence supporters in other parties not to stand in elections short of independence! Such an approach can only damage the

ENOUGHMANIA: Scotland wants real change, not independence for its own sake, not for a kinder way to run today’s deeply unequal country, but to introduce sweeping change which meets the needs of both people and planet



Neither Sturgeon or Corbyn have the answer

campaign both to gain and win a second referendum and runs counter to all the positive experiences of the recent Yes campaign.

Pro-independence voters need to be offered more than just SNP business as usual Holyrood management, and challengers such as RISE, Scotland’s Left Alliance, will provide it.

For Scottish Labour, the challenge of translating Corbynmania into a modest recovery, never mind power, is massive and centres not just on the dire, right wing record of years of entrenched power resembling Soviet-era Eastern Europe but much more fundamentally an incomprehension of, shading towards hostility to, Scottish opinion.

Corbyn’s project is already under challenge from the right wing machine with the nauseating spectacle of trade unions combining with nuke-backing MPs to block opposition to Trident renewal at the Brighton conference providing a salutary lesson on who is in power in the party.

This was followed by a major climb down by long standing hard left Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell as he parked demands for radical socialist change in area after area in a welter of consultations and expert groups postponing change to another day. Labour is to vote for Osborne’s spending charter which justifies Tory cuts.

However the key problem facing Scottish Labour was spotlighted in Corbyn’s conference speech and his trumpeting of his British values. Simply put, Corbyn is a unionist, leading a

unionist party that opposes not just independence and a second referendum but further powers for Holyrood.

He goes out of his way to stress his British values.

Yet in Scotland, the majority of the left and key working class areas such as Glasgow and Dundee back independence and reject the idea that the British state—particularly after Better Together’s lies—has much to offer by way of progressive solutions.

Scotland is beset by poverty, low pay, insecure work, cuts in services and lives under the shadow of Trident missiles. All this is imposed by a Tory party reduced to a rump in Scotland and, in many areas, supported by Labour.

Awakening

Scotland is crying out for real change, not independence for its own sake, not for a kinder way to run today’s deeply unequal country, but to introduce sweeping change which meets the needs of both people and planet.

That was what the thousands who campaigned for Yes last year wanted and that awakening and energy must not be allowed to wither away.

The task of the pro-independence left is to build on that base with campaigning for RISE, Scotland’s Left Alliance, which raises the issues and, in alliance with other social movements and campaigns offers real change.

Scotland is ready for change and the pro-independence left organised in RISE has a central role to play in winning real democracy and social change.

by Sandra Webster, SSP
national co-spokesperson

Benefit cuts link to deaths

ALL DEATHS impact on the family and friends of the person who has died. Especially so when it is by someone's own hand.

Frequently, suicide is accompanied by the guilt of those left behind while they wonder if they could have helped. Coroners rarely comment on the reasons for a suicide but for the first time a British coroner laid the blame of Michael O'Sullivan's suicide at the benefits system that had failed him.

In previous tragedies, the failure of the DWP and the Kafkaesque benefits system has been linked to many people's deaths but Mary Hassell concluded the trigger for his death was the fitness for work assessment. She raised her concerns that others may face a similar burden to Mr O'Sullivan.

The DWP have admitted that they did not take into account Mr O'Sullivan's depressive illness and that it was not even part of the notes which formed his fit for work assessment.

They also ignored of the opinions of three health professionals who knew Mr O'Sullivan well including his own GP and consultant psychiatrist.

Tragedy

The DWP stated that suicidal thoughts expressed should be noted but were "regrettably not followed in this case." Unfortunately, the tragedy of Mr O'Sullivan's death is not the only one.

Pensioner Malcolm Burge committed suicide after being pursued for a housing benefit payment of only £800. He had worked as a gardener all his life before becoming a full time carer for his elderly parents who suffered ill health.

The coroner in Mr Burge's case cited he was let down by a bureaucratic nightmare. He was described by family members as a quiet man who did not understand new technology.



MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN: coroner blamed benefits system for his suicide

Rather than sending emails, he sent letters to his local council using carbon paper.

Just a few days after being threatened by court action, he set himself on fire suffering 100 per cent burns and died in hospital shortly after. Mr Burge had £50 in his bank account and in his final letter wrote to the council told them this. He could see no other way out. Again the council involved has said they have changed their systems to prevent further tragedies.

The fact remains though that the changes in the benefit system are contributing to individuals' deaths. This is both a human and a societal tragedy.

Iain Duncan Smith may claim in interviews that there is no direct link with benefit reforms but his own department the DWP have instigated 60 internal re-

views since 2012 after the suicides of 60 people. We are talking about humans here not statistics. Disability charities also say 90 people a month have died after being found fit for work by work capability assessments.

The benefit cuts which are having a huge impact on people's lives is dangerous for your health. It should come with a government health warning. Though this government will see these deaths as nothing more than cold Malthusian mathematics.

Mark Wood starved to death after his benefits were cut after being found fit for work. His weight had plummeted to just five stone and eight pounds when he died. He had no food in his refrigerator only the insulin he was dependent on to control his diabetes.

Mr Wood lived with Asperger's and had food phobias. His family link the stress of being found fit for work for his death.

This is modern Britain—one of the richest countries in the world—but it seems the clock is turning back to Dickensian times.

Since the benefit cuts began, people have been dying. Many others find their health severely affected by being forced to look for work or survive on an ever increasingly limited budget.

As the *Voice* often reminds its readers, when Cameron came to power, he promised to protect the most vulnerable. What happened to Michael O'Sullivan, Malcolm Burge and Mark Wood and all those who have died after being found fit for work?

The Smith Commission promised to devolve disability benefits to Scotland and the Scottish Government are consulting on policies at present.

This will be the testing time for the SNP to see if they truly are an anti-austerity party by demonstrating to the rest of the UK that there is a decent way to treat and respect people and that professionals who know people well should decide if they are fit for work someone who sees them for an hour or so at a work capability assessment.

Challenge rhetoric

They must take up the challenge and not just criticise the policies of this Tory government, though they are inhuman.

In these times, we must reach out to others too, in our individual actions and as a political movement—that is truly anti-austerity and offers a different way.

We must challenge the 'strivers and skivers' rhetoric and remind everyone that we are all human. Each death is a personal and societal responsibility, and we should hope that each death will be the last.

Let's put pressure to those who wield power—even better—let's campaign, so we have the opportunity to transform our society.

Challenging revenge porn at its roots

by Jenni Gunn

THERE HAVE been many high-profile victims in recent years of a dangerous online phenomenon—revenge porn. Whilst celebrity victims have garnered the lion's share of media coverage, the vast majority of victims of non-consensual pornography are ordinary people. Correction: ordinary women.

Non-consensual pornography, or revenge porn, is defined as the sharing of sexually explicit images of an individual without their consent. Women are subjected to humiliation, invasion of privacy and danger to their person as sexually explicit images are shared with voyeuristic strangers, often accompanied by the victim's name, address, workplace and contact information.

This causes significant damage to an individual's emotional, mental and physical health; countless women have received death threats, threats of rape and sexual violence from anonymous internet trolls accessing porn sites filled with non-consensual material.

The existence of revenge porn is adding to the increasingly dangerous world that women inhabit

in modern day society—where women are treated as passive, sexualised objects to be used as entertainment and sexual gratification of men, regardless of consent.

It is within this context that we should be dealing with the phenomenon of non-consensual pornography, which is not merely a betrayal of trust or an invasion of privacy, but something much more inherently destructive.

Sexual assault

The definition of sexual assault under UK law is described as an act which violates a person's sexual autonomy. By this definition, revenge porn is tantamount to sexual assault. The victim is robbed of her own agency and autonomy when images that we shared with a partner in trust are then shared and distributed for the sexual entertainment of complete strangers.

Victims are left not only humiliated, but disempowered. For many victims, the fact that these abuses occur in the online world makes them no less damaging than an assault that takes place in the workplace or on the street: and the law should reflect this reality.

But the question remains—why are women continuing to become

victims of online sexual abuse at the hands of disgruntled ex-partners or vicious internet hackers?

As recent high profile cases have demonstrated, many commentators have blamed victims for sharing explicit content with trusted partners in the first place.

In fact, the UK government has introduced new guidelines in an attempt to tackle the rise of revenge porn, with the slogan 'Be Aware B4 You Share'. This demonstrates a blatant example of victim blaming. It has been a time honoured tradition within our patriarchal society to scrutinise a victim's dress, alcohol consumption, past sex life when she has been raped or sexually assaulted—seeking to blame everyone and everything but the perpetrator.

The tendency in our society to blame victims of rape and abuse causes victims themselves to take on a sense of guilt, shame and self-loathing, leading to a culture where crimes against women who are raped or abused are vastly under reported.

We have to ensure that we stamp out victim blaming in all cases of sexual abuse and assault—whether on or offline, and legislation protecting the rights of

victims goes some way in ensuring that we take victims seriously.

However, the way women are portrayed and used as sexual objects speaks to a much deeper issue about our entire society and how women are viewed as participants in that society.

Although legislation is indeed crucial in tackling instances of revenge porn, it is the perception and status of women as largely defined by the media which is creating the conditions in which abuse of women can flourish.

In order to really make any substantial change in terms of equality, we must challenge the pervasive misogyny within our culture which teaches both men and women that females are to be used as sexual objects. We see highly sexualised images of women and girls across our media landscape: in advertising, in the film and music industries and beyond. The internet age has made the access and distribution of porn easier than ever. These images send a clear message—females exist for the gratification of men.

Alternative narrative

Legislation is not only important, but necessary. However, if we are ever to strive towards a culture where men and women are given equal opportunity to progress, we cannot rely on the law alone. Laws may give greater rights to victims, but laws do not challenge the underlying problems which cause these issues in the first instance.

We need to challenge prevailing attitudes and media stereotypes, providing an alternative narrative and portraying women in all their diversity. We need to be brave, and challenge casual sexism in our everyday lives, no matter how uncomfortable.

Finally—we need to teach our young women that they should accept no boundaries and be put in no boxes. And they should never be afraid to speak out against abuse, no matter where it happens.

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by Colin Fox, SSP
national co-spokesperson

"AMID ALL the talk about the if, when, how and why of a second referendum, a technicality is being overlooked," *Sunday Herald* columnist Ian Bell reminds us, "David Cameron says you can't have one."

Monarchist-loving nationalists might also like to note, adds Bell, that in the last analysis a second vote on Scotland's democratic right to self-determination rests with "The Queen's Most Excellent Majesty in Council". And neither she nor her Prime Minister will give permission for one if a Yes vote appears likely.

Such anti-democratic nonsense is not the only conundrum facing the independence movement over a second referendum. The SNP have made it clear their main aim now is to secure another majority at Holyrood. And they are convinced this cannot be achieved by stressing independence as the issue in the minds of conservative voters in the North East of Scotland.

Retaining John Swinney's seat at Holyrood (and others in strong No voting areas) remains their top priority. If a commitment to a second referendum puts that at risk then they will simply not call for it.

Ducking the issue

Notwithstanding two recent opinion polls that suggested a majority would vote for independence, SNP leaders privately acknowledge that a second referendum held now would be lost as most people would see it as defying the 'will of the people' as expressed last year.

The nationalists therefore intend to duck the second referendum issue in their forthcoming Holyrood manifesto. Losing a second No vote, they correctly conclude, would set the independence movement back a generation. And yet it is not just as simple as that. For as Jim Sillars makes clear in his new book

Both Corbynmania and Nicolamania in retreat



JEREMY CORBYN: seeks like-minded comrades in Scottish Labour

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

In Place or Failure, a new mandate is essential if the independence movement is to persuade the UK Prime Minister to concede a second vote. Failure to secure such a mandate next May would be a major mistake.

So how do we set a date without restricting the chances of success? The answer, Jim Sillars suggests, is to leave the date open but within the next five years. That way we can capitalise on any substantial changes in the political situation and allow time to mobilise the broad-based campaign needed to win.

Those cross-party forces are more important than ever after Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader. Although he is increasingly a prisoner of his right wing and opposes independence, Corbyn is nonetheless well to the left of the SNP and capable as Ian Bell puts it of "lobbing repeated shells into nationalist trenches".

Indeed, in his first two weeks, he exposed several SNP weaknesses on the monarchy, public

ownership, fracking and austerity. Forcing the normally sure-footed Alex Salmond to admit he frequently sings the National Anthem (with a third verse which promises to 'crush rebellious Scots') and bows obsequiously to 'Her Most Excellent Majesty' every chance he gets.

Corbyn easily exposed the nationalists soft underbelly, its right/left contradictions. SNP Energy Minister Fergus 'Fracker' Ewing was also badly exposed when he condemned Corbyn's promise to take the big six power companies back into public hands despite it being very popular with the vast majority of Scottish voters.

The Scottish Socialist Party certainly shares this desire to see the energy companies renationalised—mind you it is neither Labour nor SNP party policy to do so. Nor is it likely to be so.

In these new political circumstances, the role of the SSP and RISE, Scotland's Left Alliance, will be crucial for the independ-

ence movement in returning Corbyn's 'shells'.

Those drawn to Corbyn's progressive ideas will recognise the nationalists are nowhere near as left-wing as they would like people to believe.

The pressure on Corbyn from the neoliberals in his own party is considerable, it's true, yet it is matched by those in the SNP like John Swinney, Keith Brown, Richard Lockhead and Fergus Ewing who argue against austerity before meekly and crucially qualifying their opposition by adding "on this scale and at this time". Nicola Sturgeon does that too.

Ian Bell's timely warning therefore that "this might be as good as it gets in terms of popularity for the SNP and Nicola Sturgeon" should be heeded by all independence supporters.

The nationalists, having demobilised the Yes movement, have left it vulnerable to attack. And like others, Ian Bell is alarmed at seeing it dissipated just as the Corbyn challenge emerges.

SNP/Labour rhetoric

Scottish Socialist Party and RISE activists throughout Scotland are therefore right to step up our activities on the streets and in working class communities in defence of an independent socialist Scotland.

Both Corbynmania and Nicolamania evaporate in the cold light of day because neither Labour nor the SNP's actions match their leaders rhetoric.

RISE and the SSP intend to become Scotland's left opposition by taking up issues such as a £10-an-hour living wage, ending zero hour contracts and welcoming migrants and refugees to 21st century Scotland.

• In the first of two articles,
Richie Venton looks at the
SNP and trade unions

by Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace organiser

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP: Pitfalls and traps for workers

AS THE Tories take a claw hammer to workers' rights, and swing their wrecking ball at jobs, wages, tax credits and public services, it's no wonder workers search for a political alternative.

The cream of the Scottish working class has joined the SSP, the socialist contingent of the 630,000-strong trade union movement. They are rightly attracted by the SSP's track record of solidarity with workers in struggle; unflinching fight for an immediate £10-an-hour minimum wage for all at 16; our advocacy of democratic public ownership, and our tireless campaigning for a charter of workers' rights, as a core human right.

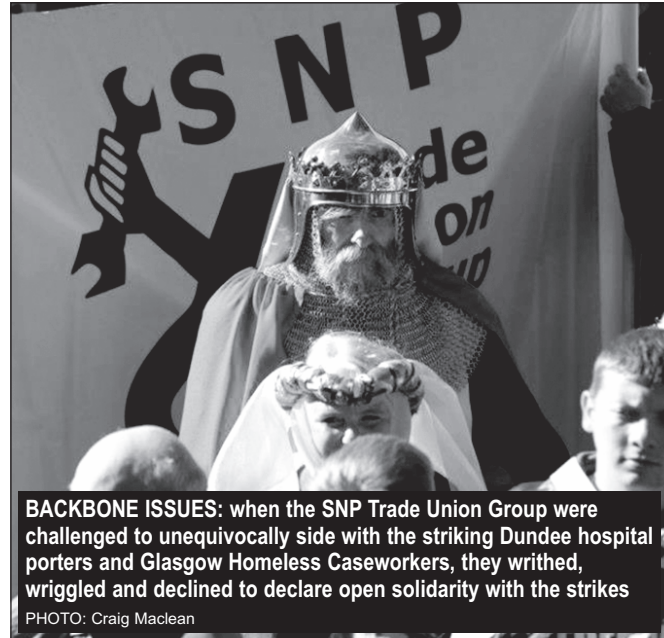
But given their near-monopoly of Scottish politics since the referendum, and the power they wield, thousands of trade unionists and workers see the SNP as an immediate vehicle for their aspirations.

Trade Union Group

The SNP claims that within its overall, phenomenal growth to about 112,000 members, their Trade Union Group (TUG) has rocketed from 800 to 16,000—at least up until the Corbyn factor, outnumbering the entire membership of Scottish Labour.

Some have joined the SNP TUG under the false impression that it's an actual union, such is their disenchantment with their own trade union. Others purely because they see the SNP as the big vehicle to climb aboard for independence, and tick the box to register as a trade union member.

Others still, doubtless attracted by the SNP's mood music towards the trade union movement—in technicolour contrast to the savage hostility of the class war launched on the unions by the Tories, and the decades of neglect and abuse of workers'



BACKBONE ISSUES: when the SNP Trade Union Group were challenged to unequivocally side with the striking Dundee hospital porters and Glasgow Homeless Caseworkers, they writhed, wriggled and declined to declare open solidarity with the strikes

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

loyalty by Labour. But what does the SNP actually offer workers? What does their very welcome talk of inclusion of the unions amount to? What does their oft-trumpeted belief in 'Social Partnership' mean in practice?

One of the most comprehensive statements of SNP policy on the unions and workers' rights was carried in the November 2013 SNP government White Paper, *Scotland's Future*.

It promised, given the powers of independence, to "reverse recent changes introduced at Westminster which reduce key aspects of workers' rights. For example, we will restore a 90-day consultation period on redundancies affecting 100 or more employees." And to abolish the pernicious 'shares for rights' scheme, whereby workers were given a few piddling shares as reward for selling all their rights on redundancy, unfair dismissal, etc.

Very welcome, considering the jailhouse conditions endured under the Tories. But never a single mention from this voluminous SNP document of fully repealing the bulging

package of anti-union laws ushered in by Thatcher, retained by Blair and Brown, now being made infinitely more repressive by Cameron's dictatorship.

Nor have the SNP pledged repeal before or since the referendum. For instance, to their full credit, they have argued and voted against the current Tory Trade Union Bill—but still never once promised to repeal the batch of repressive legislation that the Bill is being riveted onto. Even in the scenario of an SNP government with full control over employment law, that implies the retention of at least the majority of the most repressive anti-union laws in the entire western world.

The SNP Trade Union Group is undoubtedly on the left flank of the SNP. It has submitted Motions to the forthcoming SNP conference calling for opposition to the Trade Union Bill, an outright ban on fracking (rather than just a moratorium) and for a public inquiry into blacklisting of trade unionists in Scotland. But even they don't explicitly call for total repeal of the vicious anti-worker laws.

The core philosophy of the SNP is 'Social Partnership'. In the White Paper they spelled it out: "working directly with the trade unions, employers' associations, employers and voluntary sector to build a partnership approach to addressing labour market challenges".

But the fundamental feature of a capitalist society—with private ownership and the profit motive pivotal—is that the interests of workers and capitalist employers do not coincide. They clash, in what at root is a struggle over who gets the bigger share of the wealth produced: workers in their wages, conditions and 'social wage', or owners in profit and shareholders' dividends.

Any attempt at 'social partnership' within the framework of such a capitalist 'free-market' economy is not a partnership of equals, between two sets of people with common interests, but a partnership of the rider and the horse! This philosophy shows its inherent flaws when confronted by the concrete reality of workers being forced to fight back in self-defence and in opposition to attacks on the public services they provide.

Strikes reveal flaws

For example, when the SNP and its Trade Union Group were challenged to unequivocally side with the striking Dundee hospital porters and Glasgow Homeless Caseworkers—a challenge laid down by members of Trade Unionists for Independence, not by some opportunist Labour hacks—they writhed, wriggled and declined to declare open solidarity with the strikes.

The SNP TUG were caught between their instincts as trade unionists and their loyalty to the philosophy of 'social partnership'; mangled up in the clash between

workers seeking a fair and justified jobs regrading in both strikes, and the public sector employers involved, who are primarily funded by the SNP government.

The baleful consequences of 'social partnership' between trade unions and employers was even more starkly shown up in the recent CalMac ferries strike.

When RMT members balloted and went on strike in defence of jobs, pensions and conditions in the face of a Scottish Government tendering process likely to result in privatisation, the Scottish Socialist Party didn't hesitate to side with the ferry workers and organise support for them.

RMT rebuked SNP

In contrast, the SNP government tried to deny transferring the service to a private company (Serco) would be privatisation, and the SNP TUG squirmed with embarrassing verbal gymnastics about "recognising the right to strike" and how the strikers were being met by SNP Ministers, but patently failed to unequivocally support the strike. This earned them the stern rebuke of the RMT—a union affiliated to no political party, after being expelled from Labour when they (temporarily) affiliated to the SSP over ten years ago.

So whilst individual SNP members in the unions will have supported the strikers mentioned above, the SNP as a party—and even its Trade Union Group—were prisoners of their own false belief in the common interests of workers and big employers, or of workers and the dictates of the capitalist European Union's directives on privatisation.

Instead of defying such forces, the SNP tried to straddle two horses, as they charged off in opposite directions. In the case of the ferries strike, they only eventually intervened to concede promises on jobs and pensions after being forced to by the tenacity of an escalating strike which threatened to expose the hollowness of their 'social partnership'.

RISE needs to be provocative – ready to challenge the powerful

by Jonathon Shafi

THE COMING together of RISE, Scotland's Left Alliance, has been described as the most important left unity initiative in a generation. The launch conference was a huge success as activists and campaigners from a diverse range of backgrounds, campaigns and organisations, packed into the Glasgow Marriott. In addition the alliance has received big media coverage and as recent outreach work has shown, this has paid off.

Local circles are being set up all over Scotland. From the Borders to Inverness RISE groups are forming to kick start campaigning in localities. Hundreds of people have attended these local launch events and circle planning meetings. We are in the process of building from the ground up a strong network of both experienced and new activists that will be the bedrock of running a mass campaign in 2016.

Circles

The local Circles are to be hubs of organisation and political debate. They are to be diverse in their make-up, and the key to success locally is to constantly seek to broaden out the number and backgrounds of people involved. Generating real circles which are exciting to attend and meaningful to activists is going to be vital—and all the signs are positive in terms of their development.

At a national level, the Forum which includes initial signatories and representation from a range of social movements and organisations will now extend to include representation from local groups.

This national forum will help to give coherence to our work between now and the November Democratic Assembly where we

will bring together the key features of our policy platform and agree on the structures we need to take us into the election.

This is the place where the local and the national come together, allowing for communication and the transfer of ideas across the country. There is a working group specifically set up to develop structures, and these ideas will be presented to forums in the weeks preceding the November conference.

Getting the next few months right is essential. And in those months the work we need to do involves hard graft and real attention to detail.

We must ensure that every member is involved as far as possible, that we are steadily raising money, that we are recruiting and that we are developing organisationally to a point where we can run a fully-fledged campaign that can rival the mainstream parties in terms of presence on the ground, and stories in the media.

This is possible, and if we make it happen, RISE can become the story of the election. We need dozens of Circles, a clear national strategy and a dynamic campaign. We are off to a very positive start. Working collectively, pooling the talents of everyone involved and growing the alliance can achieve this.

So—we have a big task ahead. But as with all developing movements we cannot have focus everything on organisation and risk discarding the politics. In the end it is our political conviction and the articulation of it that is going to win people to our ideas.

We live in a very fluid political environment where unexpected events can take place that fundamentally alter the situation. We need to be ready to engage with that changing terrain. The

independence movement from which RISE is born is not the private property of the SNP. On a growing range of questions: Nato, the monarchy, currency union, closeness to big business and now potentially fracking there is a clear need for a socialist alternative that rejects neoliberalism whole sale and without equivocation.

We can ask the hard questions, and provide the radical solutions needed. Talk of eradicating poverty is cheap. We need action. There is a reason why government after government talks a good game on such issues but fails to deliver. Simply put: unless you are going to challenge the vested interests of the elite and take the commanding heights of the economy into democratic control, the growing gulf between rich and poor will continue.

Rigged for the rich

To conclude—we are at an important phase in our development. Let's work hard to build the groundwork, and develop democratic and effective structures. Let's pull together our policy work and set out a radical platform for 2016.

Let RISE be provocative and ready to challenge the injustices in our society that stem from a system rigged for the rich.

And let no one tell us that the work of the radical left was not critical in winning 45 per cent of the vote in 2014.

Yes we need another referendum. But we also need to win it. Discarding our ideas will do nothing but set it back, as the SNP cannot win alone. Together we must strive to put socialists back in Holyrood, while at the same time building an extra-parliamentary movement. In one slogan: one foot in the parliament—a thousand on the streets.

Time for a citizens' solution to Scotland's media crisis

by Jack Ferguson

THE RECENT news that the editor of both the *Sunday Herald* and *The National*, Richard Walker, is to resign as part of an effort by owners Newsquest to cut costs is a sobering one for anyone who takes seriously the future of Scottish democracy.

Tributes to Walker poured in after the announcement, with figures including Pat Kane, who said he had shown “powerful blend of principle, and business acumen,” in first making the *Sunday Herald* the only mainstream commercial newspaper to support independence, and in the aftermath of the referendum launching *The National*, giving the ongoing Yes movement had a national daily paper.

Both of these titles have been a huge success, with the *Sunday Herald* seeing a consistent bump in its sales as compared to 2013. Which is why the news that Walker is to leave is so disturbing—these are the newspapers that are meant to be Scotland's commercial success stories. What hope then for other titles?

The media is in crisis, both globally and locally. Around the world we have seen the collapse of numbers working as professional journalists. Politics, business and all institutions of society are as a result at historically low levels of public oversight, enabling corruption and plutocracy to go unreported.

Corporate greed

The roots of the worldwide crisis in journalism lie in two factors. Firstly, corporate greed. In common with industries across the economy, there has been a massive trend towards corporate mergers, consolidation and cost cutting in the news industry leading to far smaller staffs than a generation ago, leaving the remaining staff grossly overworked, important events going unreported, and the pressure is constantly on to provide sales friendly, cheaply produced soft news.

Secondly, providing society with the news it requires for democratic self-government is simply no longer a profitable investment for capitalism. This is the reason that the internet has damaged traditional media organisations—not because there is

so much free content online, but because the internet makes traditional advertising obsolete. Facebook and Google are just two of the thousands of commercial entities examining your every move online, have built some of the world's most successful corporations by marketing personal data in such a way that advertisers can precision target their demographics in their homes at will.

In the past, it made sense for large companies to subsidise journalists jobs, and a thriving multifaceted media environment, because this brought in the audiences they desired to see their ads. Now this is no longer necessary—they know exactly who their customers are, and what they might buy, usually better than they know themselves. As a result advertising revenue are collapsing across the industry, and papers have been left desperate scrabbling for new business models.

Compelling vision

The vision represented by citizen journalism and alternative media is compelling, and has much to offer in the way of solutions. However, across this sector there remains an irreducible problem of resources.

Crowdfunding and relying on philanthropy will never provide the number of paid journalists with the long term stability to investigate the news that were considered essential for democracy 20 years ago.

If we must accept as a brute economic fact that the internet has removed subscription or advertising as realistic revenue streams for the majority of organisations, then what are journalists to be left to other than charity crumbs?

Society needs a multiplicity of independent media outlets that are not dominated by commercial interests or the mouthpiece of their wealthy owners. This is a basic democratic need—people cannot rule themselves without the information required to do so, and for this we need professional journalists to assist us in finding what we need to know.

The case of *WikiLeaks* is instructive here—after they posted thousands of leaked US embassy cables, it took *Guardian* journalists to go through the publicly available

data and highlight salient and interesting information before they made their impact on the world. This kind of media is something that the private sector has now been failing to provide to society for decades. Given the factors mentioned above, it could be considered a classic example of market failure. If a democratic media is valued by society, then it must be recognised as public good which requires public funding to sustain.

Democratic meritocracy

Dean Baker and Robert McChesney have developed a specific proposal for how this could be implemented in the US, which is nonetheless well worth considering as part of the debate in Scotland. In summary, it would involve a voucher being given back to all American citizens, that would allow them to donate \$200 of their taxes to non-commercial media outlets of their choice. This would allow the proposal to circumvent obvious complaints of state control from opponents of public funding.

Proposed new media organisations seeking access to this funding would have to certify themselves as non-commercial and accept no advertising. All material they produced in turn would be public domain and available to all online. The result would be an intensely competitive media environment, but without the corporate dictation of coverage that comes with a commercial system. A way to create a true democratic meritocracy, and an expansion of who can make themselves heard.

Here in Scotland, the undemocratic, biased nature of much of the commercial media compounds global trends, and even the public service broadcaster the BBC shamed itself with its referendum coverage.

While the flowering of Scottish alternative media, such as *Bella Caledonia*, *Common Space* and *The Ferret*, shows a path to a more diverse and interesting media, we need many more such outlets. That is why it is timely to begin researching and adapting the idea of a citizen's news voucher to be implemented in Scotland. A nation democratically reborn can point the way to a post-capitalist, public solution to the crisis of democratic journalism.

Book review: *In Place of Failure: Making It Yes Next Time ... Soon* by **Jim Sillars**, published by Vagabond Voices, 2015

by Ken Ferguson

THIS BOOK is overdue both as an attempt to analyse the defeat of Yes last year and, equally, to map out what needs to be done to ensure we don't lose next time.

The stunning growth experienced by the Yes parties—most notably the SNP in the aftermath of the No vote, the phenomena of Nicolamania surrounding First Minister Sturgeon and SNP's crushing of once-dominant Scottish Labour have understandably buoyed Yes supporters but it also has a downside.

Riding a tide of euphoria has meant that last year's reality that No won has not been subject to much serious examination to help us understand the changes that must be made if we are to win next time.

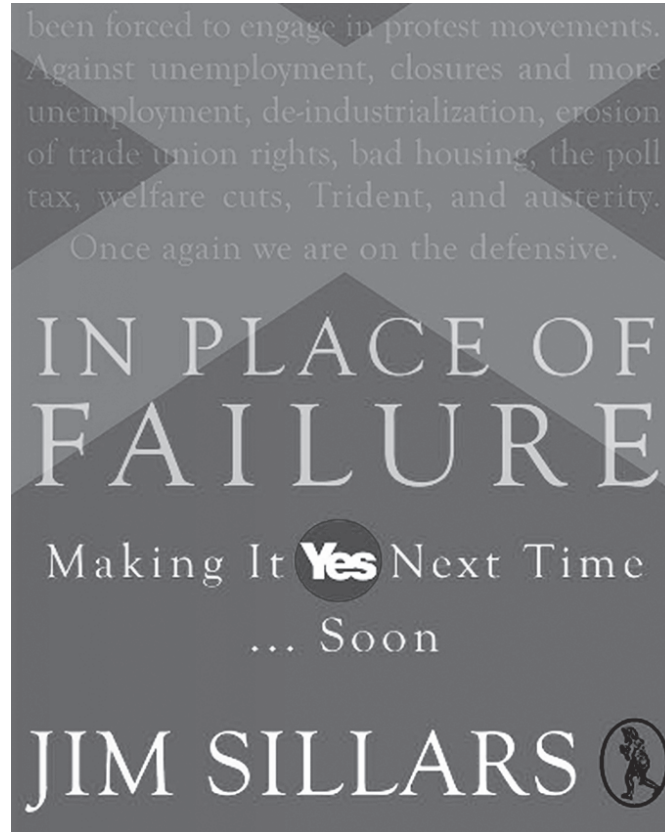
Indeed, there is now a growing danger that, based on the seemingly inexorable SNP progress, they will come to be seen as a substitute for the broad Yes movement which drew its strength from it diversity which went well beyond the ideas of any single party.

'Only way ahead'

Elements of this are already visible in exchanges between SNP supporters and others in the pro-independence movement who don't share that view such as members of RISE, the SSP and others in which the SNP is portrayed as the only way ahead and others are told to get out of the way.

Diversity and pluralism were at the heart of the mass democratic campaign which dramatically delivered the 45 per cent Yes vote, and such a movement, while it includes parties, goes well beyond them and

Sillars hits the spot on how to win for Yes



will be an indispensable part in winning a future Yes vote. It is this key reality which underpins much of the book.

Centrally, he spotlights the way in which building the Yes case around the Scottish Government's White Paper and its views on such key issues as the currency shoe-horned the official Yes campaign into positions not always shared by the non-SNP participants and gave a certain legitimacy to No claims that it was an SNP puppet.

It would be a serious mistake, argues Sillars, to box a future Yes movement into the confines acceptable to a presumably SNP-led Scottish Government rather than the priorities of the wider Yes forces.

He advocates the setting up a referendum trust fund, to finance campaigning and makes a powerful case for

such a campaign to be broad and not confined by either SNP dominance which sets the parameters of debate.

The book ranges over many of the areas utilised against Yes by its unionist opponents including currency, the EU, defence, supermarket prices and of course Gordon Brown's big lie on pensions which played a key role in the No victory.

Examining the debate on the issue of currency, the point is made that while a currency union might have been a sensible option, the reality is that it politically handed the aces to London who then refused it with Osborne's high profile Edinburgh edict delivered as an imperial decree before he turned on his heel and left for London—refusing journalists questions.

This meant that the issue was firmly under unionist control,

with the SNP and by extension Yes left fending off attacks and floundering on the infamous 'Plan B' question despite the fact that at one stage there was a majority of the Yes campaign advisory board who favoured one. Sillars puts it succinctly:

"The only conclusion we can reach from that scarring experience is no more talk of currency union. The independence movement must opt for the most obvious and sensible alternative, our own currency."

This approach of examining key issues is deployed on EU membership, Trident, jobs and many others and offers much by way of serious alternatives for next time which avoid offering a stable full of hostages to fortune to our unionist opponents.

One probably crucial issue he deals with is the Goebbels-style big lie showcased by ex-socialist former Prime Minister Brown on pensions.

Fictional fears

The entirely fictional fears whipped up among pensioners by the sanctimonious son of the manse undoubtedly played a major role in delivering a No vote from older voters.

Yet the book points out that the weapon lay to hand to destroy the big lie in the form of a British government statement issued in 2013 by the DWP which clearly stated:

"If Scotland does become independent this will have no effect on your State Pension, you will continue to receive it just as you do at present."

Perhaps a letter to all pensioners making this point—rather than waiting for them to die off—would be useful priority for future Yes campaigners backed as the book suggests by a dedicated unit dealing with this important issue.

Overall, the book offers valuable insights into how we lost last year and how we win next time, and it should be read by all Yes supporters.

Socialists can't blindly follow SNP road to indy

by Gavin Hughes,
Clydebank SSP

IN RECENT months I've heard a lot of people on the left, socialists included, declare their support for the SNP. Some, regrettably, seem to believe the SNP actually represents their class. Others believe that we in Scotland who support independence should band together behind a single party in order to more quickly achieve our goal, and then diversify our politics only in the wake of victory.

There is a credible argument for the second belief, don't get me wrong. It's largely based on the fear of potentially dividing pro-independence support, but when I weigh that risk against the risk of allowing the SNP a monopoly on independence politics, I find the wisdom of James Connolly making the decision for me every time. One passage in particular tends to come to mind:

"If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you.

"She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears

of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs."

These words proved prophetic for the Irish Free State, and for Scotland's 21st they may still hold a grain of truth in our future as well. If socialists in Scotland allow the SNP free reign in deciding the path we are to take in the lead-up to independence, and to be the sole negotiating force when finally it comes around, then we run the risk of changing the colours of the flag, the accents of the rich, and not enough else. SNP policy is riddled with contradiction, and it is in these contradictions that the risk can be found.

Monetary policy

They paint themselves as the champions of Scottish sovereignty, and yet they support a currency union with the remainder of the United Kingdom, which would leave Scotland without a central bank and render us unable to effectively control our own monetary policy.

They talk of their commitment to tackling inequality, and yet they offer a minimum wage policy no better than Labour's. I believe it is the duty of those in the SSP and the Green Party and others to check and balance the SNP, lest we arrive at independence only to have the Queen and NATO enshrined in our new constitution.

If other groups within the pro-independence campaign roll over for the SNP, we run a risk greater

than division. We risk losing sight of why we need independence in the first place. We need independence to combat the obscene levels of inequality in this country, to wipe clean the filthy slate of our international record, to remedy Scotland's sickening land ownership figures.

There are many in the SNP who do share this vision. Mhairi Black, after all, used her maiden speech in Westminster to talk of her 'traditional socialist labour' roots. But it cannot be forgotten that it is a populist party with support from all across the political spectrum.

Alex Salmond's 'old guard' had a free-market dream for Edinburgh that would make Thatcher blush. The recently elected SNP councillor Rosa Zambonini was a Labour polling agent during the referendum and is an ex-Conservative Party member. Until their 2015 landslide, the closest place to an SNP heartland in Scotland was Perth and Kinross, a former Conservative stronghold.

A socialist who quietly backs the SNP allows freedom to the party's right wing elements. We cannot allow this vocal minority of small-minded nationalists and Wealth of Nations fanboys to jeopardise the justice that is owed to Scotland's working people. We must do as the SSP have done, and as RISE plan to, and show solidarity with the SNP on

shared concerns, but never be afraid to criticise the SNP where it is necessary. And sometimes it is absolutely necessary.

Make no mistake—the SNP's inclusive pitch of 'One Scotland' is a fallacy. RISE's declared intention to become the main Scottish opposition party was met immediately with claims that we had 'shot ourselves in the foot on the first day', and that to criticise any aspect of the SNP's record in government is not only unnecessary, but petty. This kind of high-horse mentality is symptomatic of a party that has not been challenged often enough, and believes it can act with impunity. Its no wonder so many self-identifying socialists believe the SNP truly does represent their politics.

Stubborn toddler

The SNP has been shouting over any viable alternative like a stubborn toddler. And if we as socialists continue to obliviously humour this toddler's unacceptable behaviours, we could see the endless potential of our independence blunted by the flaws of blind faith in populism. A 'Scottish Free State' would be a screaming cadaver, a mockery of all we strive to achieve. As James Connolly's centenary approaches, let's do the message of his life and memory some justice and argue our own case. We must not follow blindly the SNP, but pave a parallel road to independence.

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by Bill Bonnar

Only international peace talks can end Syria's agony

NEITHER ASSAD or ISIS but international socialism. This is not actually a current slogan but a paraphrase of an earlier one; neither Washington or Moscow but international socialism. It made no sense then and in the current situation in Syria it means even less. In Syria there are only two scenarios. The first is that the Assad regime survives or voluntarily steps down as part of an internationally sponsored peace deal.

The other is that the regime is overthrown and what's left of the country finally collapses with even more disastrous consequences for the Syrian people and wider region. In this scenario, the most likely outcome is that a particularly nasty reactionary Islamic state emerges from the rubble.

Emerging from some sections of the British left is a classic example of ultra-leftism. When faced with two options, both of which are unacceptable, invent a third which can be supported.

Calling for the overthrow of the Assad regime and its replacement by a democratic and socialist republic sounds good except this option is simply not on the table. It may help some western socialists sleep better at night but has no basis in the current reality.

Unholy alliance

The opposition to the Assad regime in Syria is primarily a mixture of Islamic fundamentalist and tribal and regional based forces supported by an unholy alliance of western powers and regional Islamic states. If the country survived the overthrow of Assad they would emerge triumphant.

Assad, in fact, is the head of the ruling Baathist Party. It came to power in the 1960s as an alternative to the neo-colonial regime which ruled the country on behalf of its imperialist masters after the Second World War. The same process happened in Egypt under Abdul Nasser and later in Libya under Colonel Gaddafi. These regimes were defined by



SUFFERING:
the current war has
been devastating
for the country and
Syrian people

their opposition to the regimes they deposed. These neo-colonial regimes were put in place by the former colonisers to protect western interests. They had the trappings of medievalism retaining the power and privileges of the royal families and former ruling classes; the existed in close alliance with Islamic fundamentalist forces and only existed under the protection and patronage of the former colonial power.

The new regimes were the polar opposite. Not socialist, and in fact, often repressed socialist forces like the then powerful Syrian Communist Party who offered a different vision of the future. Rather they embraced a kind of progressive Arab nationalism based on a number of key principles. The building of modern nation states, secularism, pan Arabism and anti-imperialism. Syria, under Baathist rule, represented a good example of this.

From the 1960s to the end of the century the country underwent an economic and social

transformation. It elevated secularism to the level of a fundamental principal governing many aspects of state rule. This included the strict separation of church and state. Women's rights were established at a level rare in the Arab world while internationally Syria was a staunch opponent of Israeli aggression and a key ally of the Soviet Union.

Of course, Syria remained a capitalist country with a mixed economy, marked inequality and as the economy expanded and was transformed widespread corruption; particularly around the higher echelons of the regime and the Assad family. Also given the fractious nature of much of the country with a myriad of tribal, regional and religious groups, the authoritarian Baathist regime ruled through a combination of patronage and repression.

The current war has been devastating for the country and Syrian people. Hundreds of thousands are believed to have died while almost half the pop-

ulation have become internal or external refugees.

The regime appears strong enough to stay in power but not strong enough to win the war. The opposition are bitterly divided among themselves with several mini-civil wars going on.

They appear strong enough to enough to continue fighting but not strong or united enough to overthrow the regime.

The regime has talked about a peace process; which has strong support from Russia and Iran. This would include a cessation of fighting and the re-establishment and rebuilding of the Syrian state.

What would happen to Assad and his entourage would be part of the negotiated settlement.

There is some evidence recently that the United States and some of its western allies are warming to this position; burned by their experiences in Iraq and Libya where the overthrow of the regimes there led to the collapse of the respective countries and rise of anti-western Islamic fundamentalist forces.

Western interests

However, there is a long way to go and in fact, it is useful to look at the international alliance which has been working to overthrow the Assad regime.

Western powers like America and Britain who want to replace the 'anti-western' Assad regime with something more amenable to western interests, Israel who wants to see the removal of their main enemy in the region and Saudi Arabia who want to see the emergence of an Islamic state. And some naive western socialists.

Only a negotiated settlement and an international peace conference can end the misery of the Syrian people and halt the final destruction of the country.

by Dan Littauer

EQUALITY ISN'T just synonymous with LGBTI rights, its principle that should be applied across the country, enshrined in law.

When Gerrie Douglas-Scott (59) and Susan Douglas-Scott (54) got married on Hogmanay, Nicola Sturgeon joined in the celebration, along with many in Scotland, as not only a dream come true for a lovely couple, but their right as equals under the law. The two have first met 18 years ago and have five grown up children. They had a civil partnership in March 2006.

Speaking of which, last year Charles Keidan and Rebecca Steinfeld announced their engagement and intention to have a civil partnership, rather than a marriage. But alas, this avenue is blocked for them. Civil partnerships for same-sex couples only.

When asked about why they would like to have a civil partnership, they said:

“We want to be part of an institution that is free of patriarchal history, that formalises a relationship of equals, civil partnership captures this as it allows a formal, legal tie, but without the ‘baggage’ of a centuries-old tradition—and all the gender and cultural stereotypes that marriage entails.

“We want a simple civil contract between ourselves, where we’re recognised as partners. We hope that the UK government and the general public understands why the availability of this option is important for us as well as other same-sex and opposite-sex couples.”

There you have it, this mixed-sex couple want not only the principle of equality enshrined in law, but also in their relationship, a union of equals.

Massive support

A consultation with 700 LGBTI people and 500 non-LGBTI people by the Equality Network found that 80 per cent of both groups wanted civil partnership opened up to all across Scotland. Amongst bi and trans people, support for this was 90 per cent. Only 16 per cent overall thought that civil partnership should be phased out, and fewer than 2 per cent thought that the law should remain as it is (two tier system).

Another poll by Ipsos MORI had 71 per cent of the representative sample of 1003 people across Scotland say they want civil partnerships for all. On 22 September, the Scottish Government published their consultation on the future of civil partnership, open



until 15 December, outlining three options:

- No change: civil partnerships would continue to be available to same-sex couples only, meaning that mixed-sex couples continue to only have the option of marriage, while same-sex couples can choose either marriage or civil partnership.
- Phase out civil partnership altogether on a certain date, so that from then on, only marriage is available, to all couples regardless of gender.
- Open up civil partnership to mixed-sex couples so that both marriage and civil partnership are options open to all couples regardless of gender.

“The Government is not persuaded that opposite sex civil partnership should be introduced in Scotland, although this consultation invites views on this position. As the consultation indicates, the Government is of the view that demand would be low; there would be costs; and opposite sex couples seeking to enter into a registered relationship have the option of marrying. The Government does not have a view at this stage on which of the other two options should be followed.

“The Government has already made it clear that those in existing civil partnerships will be able to remain in their civil partnerships if they wish and that these will continue to be recognised by the Scottish Government. There is no obligation on couples to change their civil partnerships to marriage if they do not wish to do so. That remains the position.”

Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment Marco Biagi said: “This Government is immensely

proud of introducing same sex marriage, which was a milestone in achieving equality in Scotland. After careful consideration of this issue, we are not persuaded of the case for the establishment of opposite sex civil partnership in Scotland.”

Now why does the government basically tell us, here is a consultation on three options but we recommend option two or three?

I believe that option one is not in line with the principle of equality saying basically: mixed-sex couples can only choose marriage, while same-sex couples can choose marriage or civil partnership. This is not equality, it’s discrimination. Option two, phasing out civil partnerships goes against what many want, as we have seen, a union of equals without the “baggage” of marriage. Even more oddly, the Scottish Government suggested that if this option would be chosen, they would recognise civil partnerships from other countries when it will be phased out here—so discrimination will continue.

Option three therefore embodies the values of both equality and diversity—everyone gets treated equally and given equal options under the law.

It is curious that the Scottish Government that prides itself on such values seeks to bias a consultation in such a way that seems to undermine the very principle it says it promotes. Equality is a principle not a concession. That’s why I urge you to vote for option three.

• Dan Littauer is the editor and founder of *KaleidoScot*, Scotland’s first grassroots LGBTI portal