

Colin Fox: Sturgeon's Brexit claims could demobilise the independence movement

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Jobs cuts: Tories planning mass civil service sackings

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£1 • issue 472 • 26th February – 10th March 2016
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by Jenni Gunn, lead RISE candidate, Mid Scotland & Fife

THE RUSSIAN novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky famously said; "The degree of civilisation in a society can be judged by entering its prisons."

If Dostoyevsky is correct, we need to take a long, hard look at our own society and ask ourselves frankly and honestly: "is this good enough? Is this really the best that we can do?"

In light of recent reports about lack of timely access to sanitation, dozens of activists gathered outside of HMP Cornton Vale on Tuesday night to demand better conditions for inmates in Scotland's only women's prison.

The protest, organised by RISE Women, marked the third demonstration organised by the Network this month, and sought to highlight the plight of women living in confinement in Scotland.

Protestors also demanded a radical shake-up of the judicial system, which metes out custodial sentences to women who pose no threat to the general public.

I had the privilege of addressing the demonstration alongside former Scottish Socialist Party MSP Rosie Kane and RISE Glasgow candidate, Suki Sangha, at an event that I hope will help to foster a serious discussion about women's incarceration in Scotland, which is currently the second highest in northern Europe.

The heart of the issue

Rosie Kane, who spent six days in the prison for refusing to pay a fine she received for protesting against Trident nuclear weapons, addressed the gathered activists in an emotionally charged and harrowing speech. Rosie spoke about her own experiences in Cornton Vale, and about the young, vulnerable, abused women that she met during her short stay in the facility. Rosie said:

"I didn't meet one woman in Cornton Vale that hadn't suffered abuse at the hands of a male partner, a family member."

This goes to the heart of the issue: we are imprisoning women who are victims of abuse, who suffer from poor mental health, who are addicted to drugs: women who live in perpetual poverty, in communities plagued by violence and inequality.

It's high time that we stopped imprisoning poor and desperate women.

We need to address the root causes of women's imprisonment—namely, eco-

Cornton Vale protestors demand radical change



PROTEST: former SSP MSP Rosie Kane and RISE Mid Scotland & Fife lead candidate Jenni Gunn were among demonstrators demanding a radical shake-up of the judicial system, which metes out custodial sentences to women who pose no threat to the general public

nomie and social inequality, which is a scourge upon our communities the length and breadth of Scotland.

Economic and social inequality is being exacerbated by an austerity agenda that doles out social violence upon all of our vulnerable people, but under which women are being targeted. Statistics have shown that cuts to welfare benefits are hitting women twice as hard as men. Women make up 95 per cent of lone parents and 62 per cent of unpaid carers, a demographic disproportionately burdened by deep cuts in public spending. Austerity is nothing short of an assault on the living standards of women who depend on these vital services.

To add insult to injury, services that are tasked with protecting vulnerable women, such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis, are facing significant challenges from lack of funding. Whilst these organisations continue to be under-funded, and whilst poor women are plunged further into desperate situations by austerity cuts, there is little hope that we will break the cycle of violence, addiction, abuse and incarceration that affects women in some of Scotland's poorest areas.

What is to be done? Our solution must be three fold. We must ensure that women in prison are held under conditions which do not violate their most basic universal rights to respect and dignity.

Secondly, we must challenge a system that punishes women punitively for non-vi-

olent crimes by holding our courts and our government to account, and by demanding alternatives to custodial sentences by investing in community programmes that are readily available to all in need, and that support women within their own communities.

Thirdly, we must fight austerity and attacks on our public services upon which so many vulnerable people rely on for survival. Progress is being made, but complacency, at this important juncture, is not an option.

The truth of the matter is that women are not the only people that our justice system is failing, and Scotland's system is in need of serious and far reaching reform.

Take on the system

Suki Sangha, RISE Glasgow candidate and activist in RISE's Women and BAME networks stated: "Being black, being a woman, being young and being poor does not make you a target...We need to take on a system in which people are dying in police custody, where women are locked up miles away from their families and their support networks, where young people are being arrested because of their political beliefs."

The protest at Cornton Vale sought to address one important part of this failing system, but we have work to do in ensuring that our police, our courts and our government are serving the best interests of the people, and where prisoners are afforded their basic human right to dignity and respect.

by Ken Ferguson

Brexit or not, pro-indy left case remains essential

WITH THE super hyped Cameron EU “deal” already fading from memory, the real reason for the supposedly historic EU referendum is growing ever clearer.

At heart this has little to do with benefit levels, emergency brakes or border controls and everything to do with divisions in the Tory party and competing visions of how best to keep the world safe for capital generally and the money lenders of the City of London in particular.

All this overlaid on the fight for the party between the supposed “one nation” Tories who favour social compromise to secure their aims and the unrepentant disciples of Thatcher who, like their heroine, simply bludgeon their opponents.

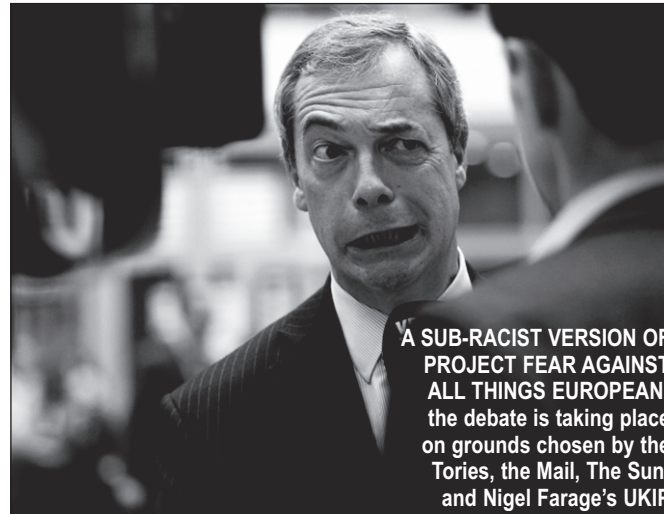
It is no surprise that the latter’s stock in trade is founded on a union jack waving nationalism which embraces a thinly-veiled racism driving their obsession with immigration. It is this view, shrilly backed by the right wing papers such as the *Mail* and *The Sun*, with Farage at its centre, which is now setting the terms of the debate.

No easy answers

For the left, the current debate has no easy answers. Some who back a leave position argue that the EU is an un-reformable capitalist club, while others call for the construction of alliances with other progressives to change it from within.

Like the Scottish Socialist Party, the *Voice* takes the latter view. Both agree that the issue at stake is how to break the power of neoliberal capitalism as a first step to a society putting people before profit.

Meanwhile however, the reality is that the debate is taking place on grounds chosen by the Tories and the issues in the spotlight aren’t workers’ rights or privatisation but freeing business from red tape, reinforcing border controls and cracking



A SUB-RACIST VERSION OF PROJECT FEAR AGAINST ALL THINGS EUROPEAN: the debate is taking place on grounds chosen by the Tories, the *Mail*, *The Sun*, and Nigel Farage’s UKIP

down in quasi-racist terms on immigrants. The strong likelihood that this will set the tone for the next four months as what is in fact an internal Tory debate—with the UKIP extremists joining in—is portrayed as a national UK political debate.

For the left this presents both dangers and opportunities. The danger is that politics across the UK—including a pro-EU Scotland—is pulled to the right as the right wing media replay a sub-racist version of Project Fear against all things European, played out against the background of demands for Britain in general, and England in particular, to rally to the union jack and get out.

That Scotland is not necessarily immune to such politics was evidenced in a recent *Daily Record* poll which projected the possibility of UKIP winning up to seven MSPs in May, highlighting the urgent need for a pro-independence left alternative with real answers to such issues as low pay, chronic housing shortages and breaking the grip of the no-mandate Tories in Scotland.

The opportunity lies to challenge both the supposed left-turning Labour and the business-as-usual managerialism of the SNP from a position which clearly supports the right of Holyrood to call a second in-

dyref as a key step towards transforming Scotland.

The current crisis of cuts and sackings in local councils is a prime example of why such a programme is urgently needed, as the SNP, after years of freezing the unfair Council Tax, signal that they have U-turned on plans to replace it, planning to tweak it instead.

We need to be clear that RISE, Scotland’s Left Alliance, opposes both Westminster and Holyrood cuts and—picking up on the work pioneered by the Scottish Socialist Party—backs an income-based Scottish Service Tax to make the rich pay their fair share of council services.

A real alternative is also urgent, on the issue of the right to call a second independence referendum, and the timing, and is-

sues on which the pro-indy forces would campaign to win.

There must, in this context, be real doubts about the approach of the SNP where on the one hand we are told that a commitment to indyref2 will not figure in the Holyrood manifesto but will be “unstoppable” in the event of Brexit.

This is at best confused and at worst dangerous for the entire independence case.

The idea that a mandate for a second referendum can be left out of May’s manifesto, only to be claimed from a triumphant Tory right which has just won a Brexit vote over the UK irrespective of Scottish votes, is fantasy.

Strategic approach

The idea that a UK Tory Prime Minister—probably post-Brexit Boris Johnson, basking in a union jack sunburst of hard-right victory—would then concede a referendum not sought two months earlier in an SNP manifesto, is just not credible.

However, even more importantly, the left needs to be clear not just of the indyref case but of the policies on key issues such as currency, on which it would be fought. Such a strategic approach is essential for victory, rather than relying on random events, including Brexit, to determine our approach.

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by Cat Boyd,
RISE lead candidate in Glasgow

THE EUROPEAN Union referendum is coming, so get set for the Festival of Britain, 2016-style. I envision a grotesque carnival of the mad, the bad, and the downright scary.

I won't go over what I've said elsewhere about the European Union—other than to say that I think the centre-left is far too soft on Brussels, particularly after what happened in Greece.

Here's what we need to know. There are reasonable and rational reasons to want to stay in the European Union, and equally there are good reasons to leave.

Unfortunately, none of those reasons will be heard before 23 June. Neither side wants a reasonable argument.

All we'll hear is immigrant-this, scrounger-that, and how everything used to be sweet in Britain way back when.

In place of reasonable arguments, we have "innies" versus "outies".

The innies are trumpeting David Cameron's programme for European reform. That means more power for bankers in the City of London, and less freedom of movement. Predictably, Britain's liberals from *The Guardian* onwards are falling in behind this message—anything to save the EU!

The outies are Michael Gove, Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage and George Galloway. Less the good, the bad, and the ugly; more the ugly, the uglier, the ugliest, and the uglier still. Put simply, either result is a disaster for the British working class.

The case for optimism

Okay, that's the pessimistic bit over. Now, let's focus on the case for optimism.

The EU question revives the question of Scottish independence. Bookmakers have slashed the odds on Scotland holding another referendum before 2021. Regardless of your views on the EU, that's a tremendously good thing.

Moralisers in the British media hark on about how a referendum should be a "once in a lifetime" phenomenon. What nonsense. What utter contempt for democracy.

Let's be clear: Scotland should have as many referendums as we want, on a variety of issues (for instance, do we want parasitical royals draining the public coffers?).

The Scottish people need to chart their own indyref course



Here's my only point of caution: let's not get narrowly fixated on the European debate as the trigger for the next referendum. Let's not build our moral case on Britain's relationship with Brussels bureaucracy.

Instead, let's reiterate the real reasons we need another referendum.

The case for devolution was built on 18 years of solid Tory rule that Scotland didn't vote for.

During that time, North Sea oil revenues were squandered and our industrial economy all but collapsed. Who would bet against another generation like this ahead, with George Osborne or Boris Johnson at the helm?

Essentially, we're moving into a grim situation where Britain is divided between two opposing authorities—nationalists in

Scotland, cuts-crazed Tories in England. The truth is that only Scottish independence can cut that knot and free up progressive oppositional politics again.

Without the threat of independence as a lever, the SNP are being pressured into accepting a terrible fiscal framework for Scotland that will pass more cuts down the chain. Unless we've got a rolling mandate for independence, SNP leaders will be forced to defend and rationalise cuts. That's why it's a mistake to keep the issue off the agenda.

The timeline for independence can't be left to the Scottish Government alone. They are trying to reconcile too many tasks—trying simultaneously to be the leaders of protest and provincial administrators. Taking on both challenges is a dangerous recipe that

has led to over-cautious politics. When I spoke at the Radical Independence conference at the weekend, I was reminded of the reasons why I helped establish the Radical Independence campaign.

We took lots of stick when it was set up. Some called us an MI5 front. Some called us a Trojan horse for the Labour Party. The old left said we had capitulated to nationalism, and Labour activists claimed we were funded by Brian Souter. Everyone predicted we would fail, that we were bound to fail, that failure was certain.

So why didn't we fall behind the well-resourced official campaigns? Why did we use our own scarce resources to fund something that might sink us, when our elders and betters pleaded caution, when the odds were stacked against us?

My own answer is simple: the official campaigns told a story of Scotland that made no sense to me. It was a story of plucky businesspeople and middle-class professionals zooming about in a 21st-century economic powerhouse. It was one big happy family of soft civic nationalism, or one big happy family of incremental constitutional change. It was simplistic, particularly in the post-2008 era.

Seize the initiative

I wanted a story of Scotland that represented our conflicts and our complexity.

I didn't want to forget the other side of Scotland for the sake of short-term political convenience.

I wanted to remember the times when Scottish people, not politicians, seized the initiative from Scottish elites—because these are the truly inspiring moments in our history. I wanted UCS and Red Clydeside, not Michelle Mone and JK Rowling, or Sean Connery and Brian Souter.

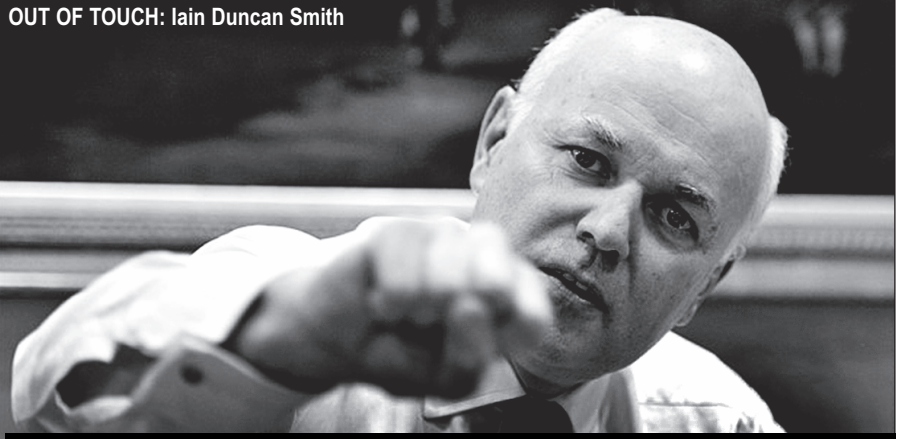
Scottish history falters when we let politicians take the initiative for us.

Let's use the European referendum to set our own timeline for independence, an independence based on true self-rule and internationalism.

Let's not wait for 18 years of Tory rule to force us, zombie-like, to shuffle our way to autonomy. Let's do it while we still have optimism and energy left in our bodies.

• *This is an edited version of a piece which recently appeared in The National*

OUT OF TOUCH: Iain Duncan Smith



A government not fit for purpose

*by Sandra Webster,
SSP co-spokesperson*

ALTHOUGH THERE was a loud 'halloo' when The Lords voted against the bedroom tax, the evil of welfare cuts continues, as the government not only try to save billions but spread their ideology that those out of work or who require support are skivers with no place in our society.

Meanwhile, quietly, lives collapse as the continued pressure forces individuals closer to the edge. So much for protecting the most vulnerable. Many people who have been forced to apply for PIP instead of DLA find they are not entitled to the new enhanced payments. 45 per cent of folk have had their mobility car removed from them. For many this is a lifeline.

'Sharon' has spina bifida and has been on DLA high rate mobility for over 20 years.

She used this to hire a vehicle which makes getting to work easier. She can walk with sticks though painfully and slowly.

At her recent work capability assessment, she lost the enhanced mobility and had to make arrangements to return her vehicle.

'I struggle to get to work'

"My car is not a luxury", she says. "It allowed me to get out and about and not have to be dependent. I struggle to get to work now and can't use public transport. They have made me more dependent.

"I used to have more freedom now I am stuck at home having to ask for help."

'Sharon' is not alone with many individuals and families being in the same boat. Universal Credit is being rolled out to families with disabilities too. Originally the Tories said they would be exempt but a new pilot with one of the areas being Musselburgh will see families with a disabled person having to apply online.

This is for new claims only but many are already worried about the affect. A pilot in South Wales saw the number of individuals in debt to their landlord increase by 20,000 to 140,000 in only seven months. Private landlords are reluctant to rent to people on benefits while social housing landlords have seen substantial drops in their income.

Having spent billions on Universal Credit, Frank Field and Iain Duncan Smith's project, the government seem to have reached the point of no return and will carry on.

The date for when all will be transferred to Universal Credit keeps changing now it is 2018. Despite the evidence that it is not fit for purpose it continues on.

Voices of dissent

The government do not like voices of dissent and have ordered the third sector to remain silent. It has been reported elsewhere that Margaret Lynch of Citizens Advice Bureau has been criticised for being too political. I hope there will still be those who call out the despicable actions of this government.

Meanwhile this out of touch government announced an ex-Amazon director will work for the DWP. Amazon use tax avoidance to increase their profits. Companies like ATOS and Capita make millions from the welfare cuts.

We talk rightly so of being anti-austerity but what does that really mean to you? Does a march or a demo alone make a difference? How do we ensure we have conversations with those affected without creating another them and us? As things continue to get worse these are issues we will have to start talking about. The cuts continue to get worse and always shall unless good people make a stand and have political influence against them. There is a different way. Austerity is their design for life. We have a different plan.

New mobilisation tactics

by Sophia Lycouris, RISE Lothians list candidate

AS MENTIONED in a previous Voice the Transnational Social Strike Platform is a group of European organisations and individuals who seek new methods of resistance against the increasing precarisation of labour in Europe, and the intensified mobility of workers in the European space, who follow any available precarious job opportunities.

The activities of this Platform also draw attention to the role of the refugee crisis, as a context which generates an even more precarious workforce, shockingly desperate and extremely vulnerable. The Platform has planned a mobilisation across Europe for the 1st of March 2016 to address these issues.

The decision for this mobilisation was taken in a transnational meeting in Poznan, Poland, last October, and the catchy title “24 hours without us” was adopted, since this mobilisation was initially conceived as a strike action for groups of precarious workers in Europe. This expression is still used in the publicity of the event, despite the fact that the idea of a traditional strike has been abandoned.

This is because it soon became evident that, although precarisation is a common theme in Europe, the way in which this situation is experienced by workers in concrete material terms differs immensely from country to country, and from one work context to another.

Strike action is normally used as a tool to make claims or protest against unwanted elements in the working conditions. The issue of the European minimum wage was initially discussed as a possible focus for the protest, yet this created a number of unsurmountable difficulties.

The European minimum wage is essentially a concept with different values in different European countries. What can one do with €10 in Germany, as opposed to what one could do with the same amount of money in Portugal?

Capitalist system weaknesses

Perhaps a mathematical formula should be developed to calculate appropriate equivalents of the European minimum wage concept in Euros and other currencies across Europe. Should this formula take into account inflation and any other factors that determine the state of the economy in each European country? Would our wages get adjusted every month?

In these conditions, what should be the concrete content of our claims during our protests? But the Transnational Social Strike coordination team realised that there was no need to foreground any concrete claims, and that this was not an appropriate step at this stage.

The Transnational Social Strike project is also a project that emphasises the link between labour struggles and political struggles. For those who acknowledge the weaknesses of the capitalist system, it is easy to understand that for every labour-related claim we protest and strike, there is a systemic fault underlining the situation. If it was possible to fix the weaknesses of the political system, we wouldn't need to pursue labour claims.

We only pursue them to make our current situation more



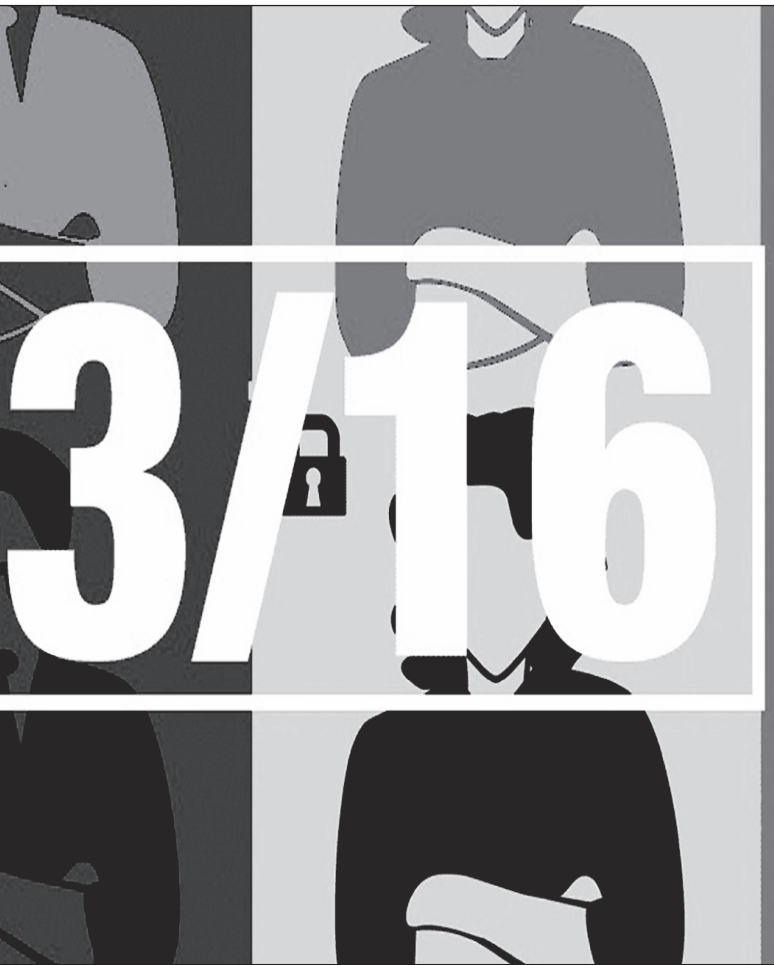
TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL STRIKE:
a project that emphasises the link between labour struggles and political struggles

viable, so that we can have more energy to keep fighting against the system. Following this logic, in the Transnational Social Strike project, we should only focus on the concept of a European minimum wage, not its monetary manifestations in different European contexts.

In this way, the European minimum wage becomes a symbol pointing us in the direction of specific political principles, such as the right for Fair Pay. The Transnational Social Strike project thus becomes a perfect example of fully-integrated political activism, offering a context in which a labour claim and the political principle underlying this claim fuse into a single element.

Focusing exclusively on the political principle and abandoning the desire to translate the political principle into concrete claims expressed in financial terms, is a position that help us resolve the tension between those who wish to stay in the EU and those who want to leave. Indeed a large number of British activists

for an alternative Europe



are against the EU and are looking forward to a prospective Brexit.

It would be unwise to make them feel excluded by presenting this project as one that is relevant to workers in the EU member states only.

As mentioned in an earlier article, the Transnational Social Strike project relates closely to the German movement Blockupy, a movement focused on concrete claims within the German context. The coordination meeting for the Transnational Social Strike mobilisation on the 1st of March took place in Berlin as part of a Blockupy Consultation meeting, also scheduled in Berlin on 6/7 February.

This meeting was crucial because, during it, Blockupy managed to overcome its recent inertia, a shock effect triggered by the unfortunate developments in Greece after the referendum.

The German Blockupy movement invested an incredible amount of energy and passion in the potential of the fight of

MOBILISATION:
the 1st of March mobilisation has been refocused as an awareness project, using a series of public, performative and discursive methods to explore the potential of a Transnational Strike as a tool of resistance to an unfair and undemocratic world

the Greek people against capitalism and the European anti-democratic structures. As a German progressive organisation experiencing directly the disastrous effect of German capitalism, Blockupy identified with the Greek struggle in an almost psychological manner, which required visual expression.

The Greek word OXI (which means NO and was used extensively in Greek protests before the Greek referendum last July) was fully integrated in the visual structure of the Blockupy logo.

Blockupy became one with the Greek struggle, and this is why when Greece was defeated by the capitalist EU, Blockupy experienced an internal collapse which was expressed as confusion and numbness, inability to proceed. There was no symbol Blockupy could fight for anymore, and there was no major tangible enemy Blockupy could unite against!

In the Blockupy Consultation meeting mentioned above, a significant amount of time was spent on discussing the problems of the lack of a major visible enemy. Frankfurt, which is Blockupy's birth place, is also the city where the European Central Bank is located.

The enemy is everywhere

In the recent years, the European Central Bank became a central target in the Blockupy mobilisations and direct action projects. Following the collapse of the Greek resistance, the attacks against the European Central Bank became pointless, and Blockupy had to redefine itself.

A major decision was taken just before the Consultation meeting in Berlin ended, to stop looking for obvious enemies personified in buildings, monuments or people.

That's because there is no major enemy to attack, the enemy is everywhere. The enemy of the alternative Europe and the opponents of the European socialism are embedded in the system, they are part of its fabric, impossible to isolate.

We cannot fight anymore just for the sake of specific labour claims as an end in itself. We can only undertake political fights through temporarily using appropriate labour claims as an anchor. But those claims cannot be the ultimate aim of the struggle, they are only disposable tools in the road for deep social and political change.

For this reason, the 1st of March mobilisation project of the Transnational Social Strike project will not be a traditional strike. This is because the left movement in Europe is not yet ready to activate a strike as a way to pursue the principle of Fair Pay.

The 1st of March mobilisation has been refocused as an awareness project, using a series of public, performative and discursive methods to explore the potential of a Transnational Strike as a tool of resistance to an unfair and undemocratic world.

The mobilisation will be materialised through colourful demonstrations, performative direct action events and discussions in different contexts. This will be a form of activism-in-progress, a transnational lab in a series of informal settings where new tactics will be debated and hopefully tested in small-scale controlled environments.

• Follow Sophia on Twitter: @sophia_lyc

Mass civil service sackings planned by the Tories

by Voice Reporter

HMRC BOSSES fired their latest shots on Tax Office workers on 16 February with the issue of 148 Compulsory Redundancy Notices.

In a move described by the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) trade union as 'entirely unnecessary and inflammatory', the staff received the news by email while outgoing Chief Executive, and newly anointed Dame of the Realm, Lin Homer, refused to even discuss the matter with the recognised representatives of the staff.

To put the level of redundancies in context, this is the greatest number of compulsory notices issued by a UK civil service department in history—three times the previous record—and signifies a clear change of policy under an extreme right-wing Tory government.

Unlike in previous years, the department has refused to implement the full range of redundancy avoidance tools available to it as part of its own HMRC and civil service-wide collective agreements. Official 'meaningful consultation' began in August last year, with 200 staff at risk—of those all but 52 are now facing the axe.

At the same time, last

November tax office bosses also announced plans to close 90 per cent of existing premises and lose up to another 25 per cent of staff by 2021, meaning that the workforce will have shrunk by over 50 per cent and number of offices reduced from over 400 to only 17 since HMRC was formed in 2005.

The department and their Tory paymasters want to send a signal, using the 148 staff facing Compulsory Redundancy, to demonstrate exactly how they will go about the mass closure campaign. It is no coincidence that Tory ministers are also seeking to cut redundancy pay just a few years after they celebrated making the system "affordable and sustainable".

A sham consultation for public sector workers, which will run until 3 May, confirms ministers want to further cut the terms for voluntary exits.

This fresh assault would overwrite major changes to the civil service compensation scheme imposed by the coalition, presented to unions and MPs in 2010 as being "long term".

And the assault is not confined to HMRC. On 3 February the Tories announced plans to close 75 per cent ALL offices in the

coming years in a wholesale retreat from providing local public services.

A statement posted online by the Cabinet Office tried to paint a picture of old-style government buildings that are no longer required.

But the real intention is buried at the end when it highlights how much floorspace is taken up by jobcentres in our communities.

A written statement by the minister Matthew Hancock describes the aim as being to create "more modern, efficient and smarter workplaces".

Poverty

But the conclusion he reaches is not to modernise or upgrade existing offices with the latest in technological innovation, it is simply to close them and force thousands of staff into poverty.

Things have even reached a surreal level with Louise Haigh, Shadow Cabinet Office Minister, exposing the lies told to staff to justify closing an office in her Sheffield constituency.

In all seriousness, an internal memoranda seen by the Voice, states that one of the main reasons for closing an office housing 250 members of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, is that the 'phones and computers don't work properly'. This is the department that is responsible for "supporting British businesses to increase productivity and compete anywhere in the world".

The timetable of mass closures HMRC is working to has been driven entirely by the end of the PFI deal—signed for 20 years by Tony Blair's New Labour government in 2001. Back then the entire estate of the

Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise was sold off to a company called Mapeley who agreed to rent the offices back to the government at a hefty premium.

Mapeley is owned in Bermuda, and therefore pays zero tax in the UK. As part of the Mapeley contract, the Revenue receives money back every time it vacates a building—hence the rush to flit before the end of the deal.

But readers should not think that this unholy union of tax collector and tax avoider is some isolated incident of the foxes taking charge of the chicken coop: HMRC's telephony partner is none other than Vodafone and its IT provider is Google, both of which pay virtually no corporation tax in the UK and have signed sweetheart deals with the tax office to vastly reduce their bills in recent years.

Industrial response

PCS has plans to meet union representatives in all affected bargaining areas to develop an industrial response and general secretary Mark Serwotka has written to TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady pointing out that, if all public sector workers are being attacked, there should be a common approach to negotiations and campaigning.

Workers in Inverness, Dundee, Irvine, East Kilbride, Glenrothes, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Livingston, Bathgate, Aberdeen, Cumbernauld, Wick and across the UK now need the full support of socialists and trade unionists in building the biggest possible campaign of sustained action against this economic, class-based vandalism.



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by Colin Fox, RISE lead candidate for the Lothians

Sturgeon Brexit indyref claims challenged

"A SECOND referendum on independence will almost certainly be demanded if the UK votes to leave the EU against Scotland's wishes," insisted First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on the Andrew Marr programme recently. Comparing David Cameron's position to King Canute, Alex Salmond claimed the Tories would be "unable to hold back the tide of Scottish public opinion" on the matter.

That would seem a reasonable claim given the gulf between what Scotland wants and what we get. But on reflection there are more holes in the SNP's case than on Donald Trump's Aberdeenshire Golf courses.

For they appear to be conceding that if English voters opt to remain in the EU—and the latest polls suggest they will—indyref2 will be off the table and demands for it demobilised once again.

There was a time when the SNP claimed winning a majority of MPs at Westminster was a mandate for independence. There was also a time when winning a majority at Holyrood was deemed a mandate.

Not anymore.

More SNP questions

Their Brexit scenario raises more questions than it answers. How for example is a second referendum to take place when the power to grant it remains with Westminster?

Is Nicola Sturgeon seriously expecting the Tory right in their Brexit hour of triumph to concede Scots another chance to break up the British state? After they had been assured the matter had been resolved for a generation? Not a chance.

Boris Johnston, the likely Tory leader by then, would accuse Nicola Sturgeon of refusing to abide by two democratic votes she'd lost. More worryingly, they might call her bluff. For they will have noticed she did not seek, nor secure, a mandate for in-



"We support a mandate for a second referendum within the lifetime of the next Parliament at a time of our choosing."

"We will only call for that second vote when we are confident of winning it."

Colin Fox

RISE

SCOTLAND'S LEFT ALLIANCE

dyref2 in her Holyrood election manifesto six weeks earlier.

For fear of losing their overall majority at Holyrood the SNP barely mentions independence, clearly believing it unpopular in many quarters. They have barely defended the cause over the past two years amid the collapse in North Sea oil prices.

And with Scotland about to suffer another round of SNP spending cuts, no one in the Yes camp believes we would win another vote in these circumstances.

Moreover, EU membership is not the issue to precipitate indyref2. Many Yes voters will oppose it this time round if the UK is outside the EU and Scotland too. Indyref2 must be fought on bread and butter issues, on the economy, on working people's living standards and on freeing Scotland from Tory rule. If there were an 'unstoppable' desire to hold a second referendum after such an EU vote, we would lose it. And that would be fatal for the independence movement.

So Nicola Sturgeon must resist the temptation. It should not be difficult. She resisted it in May 2015 when Scotland sent 56 SNP MPs out of 59 to Westminster. She resisted it when Cameron took us to war in Syria.

She resists it as we run up to the Holyrood elections despite forecasts of an SNP landslide.

If they win another majority it will be because the prevalent mood in Scotland is anti-Tory, not pro-SNP. And there is a huge difference.

It will not be 'their record in government since 2007' people support—for that is mediocre to be sure.

People are unhappy at the austerity, casualisation, poverty wages and economic insecurity attributable to the Tories. With the demise of the Labour Party, the SNP are the default anti-Tory option. But the nationalists woo conservative 'middle Scotland' who happily vote for their brand of managerialism but not independence.

This contradiction is not just a dilemma for the SNP. It revisits the conflict the Yes movement never resolved, between the SNP's core message that independence offers a non-threatening future to the well off—keep the pound, keep the Queen, retain low taxes for the wealthy, remain in the EU, remain in NATO—and the message the SSP and others emphasised that it was about profound change involving significant redistribution of

wealth, an end to corporate control over our economy, an end to vested privilege, extending equality, economic justice and democracy and jettisoning conservative values.

Second vote RISE

Despite the SNP, independence remains the elephant in the room in these elections. It is the only option we have of getting rid of the Tories and their policies in Scotland.

The Radical Independence Conference in Edinburgh examined why the SNP is so cautious on independence. In the session 'Routes to Independence' I highlighted RISE's promise of a second vote on independence within the lifetime of this Parliament at a time of our choosing. If no majority materialises, I added, we will not call it. But if one does emerge we will have secured the political mandate to press for it.

The conference also heard how the movement might pursue other options if indyref2 is closed off to us including a campaign of civil disobedience, an economic boycott, protest rallies and plans to revive the cross-party Scottish Independence Convention founded by the SSP, Greens and the SNP in 2005.

Strike back against all cuts

by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

COUNCILS ARE setting budgets that plunge the knife into the heart of workers' jobs, working conditions and the services available to children, the elderly, sick and disabled vulnerable people.

For the Westminster Tories this is grounds for champagne-fuelled celebrations. It's hacking away at the public sector, which they detest on principle, and boosting the prospects for profiteering by the private sector—and to hell with the human consequences.

For the SNP government, it's a case of much hand-wringing, justified attacks on Westminster's cuts to the Scottish block grant, and then meek and supine devolution of Tory butchery to local authorities, college and university boards... and ultimately the workers and service users who voted in their droves for the SNP as an allegedly 'anti-austerity' party.

For Labour and SNP councillors, all we see is jockeying for propaganda advantage in advance of the May elections, with councils run by both parties 'regretfully' wielding the axe to an estimated 15-20,000 jobs over two years, and countless losses of vital services in the working class districts most in need of a safety net.

Instead of passing on cuts—£350million this year alone—the SNP government, and councillors (Labour and SNP), should be standing up for the people who gave them an anti-Tory, anti-austerity mandate, and set No Cuts Budgets in defiance of Westminster, to mount a mass campaign of workers and communities to demand back some of our stolen £billions.

Shifting the burden

Alongside that they should be declaring emergency legislation in the Scottish Parliament to scrap the Council Tax and replace it with an income-based Scottish Service Tax, shifting the burden from low- and middle-paid workers to the bloated minority, thereby doubling funds for council jobs and services from £2billion to £4billion, on last year's figures.

However, those facing horrendous job insecurity, mind-wrecking workloads, and cruel cuts to daily life necessities, would be wise not to wait for either SNP or Labour politicians to discover a spine and rescue them!



CUTS KILL – KILL THE CUTS: Glasgow City Council want to shed 3,000 jobs over the next two years by non-filling of vacancies PHOTO: Craig Maclean

Labour carries out cuts whilst proposing to increase taxes on workers. The SNP implements cuts and has now dropped their pledge to abolish the Council Tax, after winning tens of thousands of votes on that promise.

Increasingly, council workers support the call for No Cuts budgets, but also see the need to take things into their own hands, by staging industrial action.

West Dunbartonshire teachers are staging courageous strikes in defence of children's education, threatened by cost-cutting reorganisation. They've resisted brutal attempts by the Labour council to pitch parents against the teachers.

The Justice for Jannies campaign is gathering steam in Glasgow, as school janitors stage prolonged strikes against a Labour council which has stooped to hiring non-union staff to cover up the chaos.

As cuts budgets are set, with disregard for the opposition of workers and communities, the union leaderships, STUC and socialists need to help prepare workers for united, coordinated action against the cuts.

I spoke to a Glasgow City Council worker about the impact of cuts, and the need to prepare strike action.

"Previous years of funding and job cuts have cascaded down to people in most need. For example, under 'personalisation' of care, last year people were entitled to five days a week at Day Care Centres, but

due to Centre closures, this year they only get two days.

"People can't afford to buy the placements, so with Social Workers bogged down in bureaucracy, trying to deal with ever-decreasing budgets, the burden increasingly falls on carers. Many are elderly, in some cases parents in their 70s caring for children in their 40s.

"Glasgow City Council want to shed 3,000 jobs over the next two years by non-filling of vacancies. But already, after years of job cuts, stress related illnesses are rocketing. Managers are reluctant to let Social Workers go because they know the post won't be filled.

"Non-replacement in Social Work has led to increased caseloads and stress, increasing sickness, meaning a worse service to the vulnerable people in need of attention, and back-breaking workload, a vicious spiral.

"Goodwill hours are built up through flexitime. Staff don't build up flexi to take a day off, because their diary is filled up for four weeks in advance. So it's really unpaid overtime.

"I know of people off sick but using annual leave and earned flexi time to cover sick absence because they're scared to build up their sickness stats, in case it leads to disciplinary action.

"Senior management were surprised at the level of uproar about the planned attacks on flexitime and other terms and conditions. We're surprised that they were surprised!

“The system couldn’t function without goodwill, where staff stay behind half an hour or more to deal with urgent cases. The council wanted to take away payments for this, through attacks on Flexi-time. They also wanted to cut annual leave to new employees—if we ever get any!—from 28 days to 25. And to give up 6 days of public holidays for annual leave, which would mean refuse collectors and residential care staff losing out thousands of pounds on enhanced payments, plus the childcare complications.

“These attacks, clawing back about £4million from workers’ terms and conditions, is one of the reasons we’ve had record levels of attendance at union meetings, including 350 at the UNISON branch AGM.

“The fury that erupted over these attacks has forced the Labour council to back down, at least for now. But we need to be vigilant. They’ll come back at us, when they think the time is right, for example after the elections are over!

Electric mood

“The mood of our UNISON branch AGM was electric, and determined to fight all cuts. All £131million. If they get away with that, what next year? The 350 members there felt it will take strike action to stop these cuts. And not just token one-day strikes either.

“Through individual strikes by small sections of workers we’ve already cushioned the blow in recent times, winning victories and regradings. People acknowledge we’ve prevented some cuts through struggle, but they’re worried about their security longer term, committed to the job they do, but unable to see themselves working until they’re 67!

“This is a savage attack on local government, and it’s being carried out by the SNP. In previous elections I’d have given the SNP my first, constituency vote. But what’s the point? They’re carrying out the attacks.”

Tuneful support for Palestinian-Scottish university campaign



DAVID ROVICS: played a fundraiser in Stirling for Scottish Universities Supporting Palestinian Students (SUSPS)

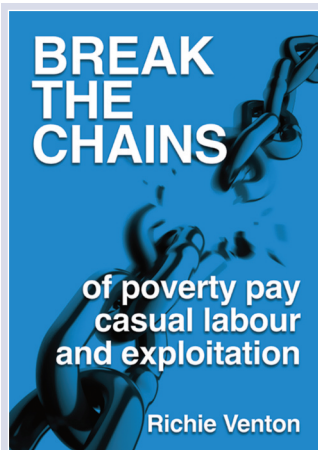
SINGER-SONGWRITER and self-proclaimed anarchist David Rovics brought his world tour ‘the Other Side’ to Scotland this week. Rovics played two gigs in Scotland firstly at the University of Stirling on Thursday evening and then he took share the stage with Glasgow rockers the Wakes the following night.

The Thursday gig was a fundraiser for Scottish Universities Supporting Palestinian Students (SUSPS), an initiative backed by the Scottish Government, the STUC and NUS Scotland, which seeks to help provide scholarships for postgraduate Palestinian students to come and study at Scottish Universities. Rovics praised the scheme saying: “Due to the fact that Palestinians live under a form of apartheid which makes travel of any kind very hard for them, it’s that much more important that Palestinian students are supported through different forms of international solidarity, like this initiative of Stirling

Students’ Union. There may also be a particular relevance to Palestinian students having the opportunity to get to know Scotland, or any other place where it is possible to have an independence movement that doesn’t involve tanks and massacres.”

Union President Andrew Kinnell commented on the SUSPS campaign: “So far we have managed to secure a fee waiver for a student to come in September, we have received backing from notable people such as Noam Chomsky and Dame Judi Dench but the fundraising efforts are far from over.

“We aim to raise at least £10,000 to provide a student with a full scholarship that would cover living expenses, flights, accommodation, visa costs and so on. I’m confident we will manage to meet this goal, and events such as this are a great way to both fundraise and raise broader awareness of the campaign and the situation students in Palestine face.”



BUY: at scottishsocialistparty.org

Review: Break the Chains

Book review: *Break the Chains* by **Richie Venton**. Order from scottishsocialistparty.org

by *Brian Reynolds, RMT CalMac coordinator*

THIS BOOK is a truly must read for all who care about equality in society. It offers an in-depth, well researched account of current times for the working class in the so-called age of austerity.

Without doubt, *Break the Chains* lays down unquestionable evidence of a war on the working class.

The author has obviously delved deep into our communities, identifying those who suffered unfairly

under successive Tory/Liberal and Labour Westminster governments. As an RMT trade union branch and Regional Council, we have gladly purchased a number of copies with the intention of encouraging as many reps and activists to read and use/discuss the contents, like we have done with another literary gem, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* by Robert Tressell.

For those of us fortunate enough to be able to purchase this fantastic book, we should pass it around to as many people as possible. It clearly lays down a credible alternative in great detail.

No resources centre or library should be without several copies of this message of hope for our class.

SNP set to abandon progressive tax policy

by Voice Reporter

AS THE *Voice* went to press, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon confirmed that the SNP will finally ditch plans to scrap the unfair Council Tax.

The SNP leader told the David Hume Institute in Edinburgh she has ditched the party's long-standing promise to scrap the Council Tax and replace it with an income based alternative.

Full details of the policy U-turn are due to be unveiled next week but reports suggest the SNP intends to retain the hated Council Tax and simply widen the gap between Band A and Band H properties. The First Minister has ignored the conclusions of the Scottish Parliament's Local Tax Commission which warned the Council Tax could not be made 'progressive'.

Day of action

RISE candidate Colin Fox said he was disappointed but not surprised by the move:

"Despite being warned by the Local Government Tax Commission it was not possible to make the Council Tax 'pigs ear' into a 'silk purse' Nicola Sturgeon has ploughed ahead regardless. In jettisoning their promise of a progressive alternative in favour of this 'pigs ear', they have abandoned low income families in Scotland when they needed help most."

This news comes ahead of a RISE Day of Action across Scotland on Saturday 27 February, where campaigners will put the case for replacing the Council Tax with an income based alternative where the burden is shifted from the low paid towards the better off.



PHOTO: Simon Whittle

Neither cuts nor a freeze but redistributive taxation

by Calum Martin,
Lothians RISE candidate

THE COUNCIL Tax must go. A regressive throwback to the Conservative governments of John Major, the Council Tax ensures that whilst countless individuals and families across Scotland must shoulder punishingly high tax-bills, the richest amongst us face barely a fraction of the same burden as a proportion of income.

That the Council Tax fails to raise necessary funding for local services is merely the salt in the wound.

Nor does the Council Tax freeze prove a solution. Simply freezing the iniquity will not lighten the tax burden for those on lower incomes, nor will it make the rich pay their fair share. All the while, councils cut or introduce charges for vital services. The point of devolution wasn't meant to have been to preserve

iniquity, but to challenge it! It's time for new redistributive local taxation—it's time for the Scottish Service Tax.

The Scottish Service Tax is a redistributive model, based on income that shifts tax burden match ability to pay. In doing so we would tax the rich their fair share and see 70 per cent of the rest of us better off as a result. Further, with a potential £4.1 billion tax take, fairer tax can be a key step to protecting and improving local services.

For the last seventeen years Holyrood has had the power to scrap the Council Tax. As we approach the fifth Scottish election since then, we need to send a clear message to Holyrood: the Council Tax has got to go—and if the current crop of MSPs won't stand up for tax justice, then they'll soon discover that RISE will.

The SSP, and now RISE, have consistently argued that Holyrood should scrap the Council Tax and replace it with a local income tax – or 'Scottish Service Tax' – based on six bandings:

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

Example: on an income of £14,000 a year, the first £10,000 is under Band 1, so you would pay no tax on that. The following £4,000 would be taxed at 4.5 per cent, under band 2, giving you a total annual bill of £180