

**Spain elections:** new left alliance deeply concerns the establishment

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**Paul Holleran:** Scots NUJ chief on why we need a vibrant, diverse media

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# Scottish Socialist Voice

History repeats itself  
'first as tragedy, then as farce'

- KARL MARX

## A TALE OF TWO REFERENDUMS

**Indyref Tragedy #1 –  
won by Project Fear**

**Euroref Farce #2 –  
feuding Tories lock horns**

- **Reject UKIP and the Union Jack Tories...**
- **Only a real left alternative can deliver real change**

- **vote Remain – FIGHT FOR A SOCIALIST EUROPE**
- **fight racism – REFUGEES WELCOME HERE**
- **people before profit – END AUSTERITY**



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## New Ken Loach film wins Palme d'Or

**VETERAN SOCIALIST** film director Ken Loach has won the prestigious Palme d'Or award at the Cannes Film Festival with a film which exposes the brutal inhumanity behind the benefit sanctions at the heart of the Tory assault on claimants and the poor.

*I, Daniel Blake* which centres on a carpenter who, through illness, cannot follow his trade and comes face to face with the punitive benefits system, blows away the disgusting propaganda of programmes such as *Benefits Street* and the heartless cynicism of well-fed Etonians' fake "all in it together" lies.

Speaking to the *Morning Star* after the announcement, actor Kate Rutter, who plays a benefits clerk reprimanded for trying to help Blake, called for a united response from both claimants and job centre staff against Tory brutality. As the *Voice* went to press, PCS (the main union involved) annual conference in Brighton was due to debate calls to "intensify" action against the benefits regime.



**KEN LOACH:** 'When there is despair, the people from the far right take advantage. We must say that another world is possible and necessary.'



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# Only a left alternative can halt the populist right

by Ken Ferguson

**THE NARROW** defeat inflicted on far right Austrian presidential candidate Norbert Hofer by Green pro-EU Alexander Van der Bellen represents both a close call for democrats across the continent and a stark warning of the dangers that lie ahead.

Here in the *Voice*, we have consistently warned of the rising tide of far right racist parties across the continent, and more widely of the danger that the endless grind of austerity will spread despair, disillusion and, in the absence of a progressive alternative, boost the populist right.

This is happening from Finland in the North to Greece in the South, and the growth of xenophobes like UKIP, and the emboldening of the anti-immigration right here in the UK, are part of that process.

Underpinning this danger is the combination of hard line austerity, frozen wages, service cuts and insecure work alongside a meek acceptance of these problems by mainstream politicians of both Tory and Labour governments.

In Scotland, while the recent boost of the Tories at Holyrood was to a large extent a reflection of a consolidation of No voters and a highly personalised campaign around Ruth Davidson, it does not mean that they don't support austerity.

## Project Fear-style scares

The exclusion of Cameron from the Tory campaign was simply tactical, as was the replacement of hard policy discussion with soft photo calls and the Tory pledge to be an effective opposition will now see the reality of Tory pressure—boosted by a largely Tory press—challenging the SNP.

This right wing brew is likely to be given impetus by the increasingly toxic, quasi-racist atmosphere flowing from the ever more 'project fear'-style scares peddled by both of the main EU referendum campaigns. Across the UK, there is now a real danger that a Brexit vote could happen and that it would in turn put the hard right at the helm at Westminster, which is why many on the left such as the SSP have supported a remain vote while demanding social change within the EU. Of course despite some of her new MSPs backing



**AUSTRIA'S CLOSE CALL:** Green pro-EU Alexander Van der Bellen (left) has become Austrian president after narrowly defeating far right candidate Norbert Hofer (right)

Brexit, the Tory leader is a Cameron loyalist on the issue and while the prospect of his defeat is at the outer edge of Davidson's calculations, this does not mean that she is anything but a pro-austerity Tory.

In her ambitions, Ms Davidson can surely rely on the full blooded support of a shrilly vocal Tory press cock-a-hoop at the apparent return of their favourites from the pariah status that the shadow of Thatcher cast them into. The danger is that this overblown rhetoric allied to the near death of Labour leaves the field open to a tartan version of austerity and neoliberalism which moves the centre of gravity of policy in a right wing direction. This may seem fanciful given the current SNP dominance but given that the Sturgeon government are set both on parking indyref2 and in concentrating on proving their competence in government vulnerability looms.

Questions are already emerging around claims about a major business deal with a Chinese firm, hard choices on fracking, and of course the so called "love triangle" scandal are early examples, and given its full spectrum dominance of Scottish politics, the question must be—can it last?

One obvious flashpoint could be education, where that phrase "the attainment gap" and the high profile move of John Swinney to tackle it could quickly become an albatross around the SNP's neck.

Davidson has already raised demands for parent-run schools and many see the government adoption of school testing as

the thin end of wedge leading down the English road with weakened council control of education, opening the way to the nightmare that has seen English parents strikes over testing pressure on kids.

It is also hard to see how the famous "gap" can be closed in a climate of poverty, low pay and cuts which impact hardest precisely on the working class kids and communities who are its victims.

Real action on pay going well beyond the largely gesture politics of fake "living wages" and delivery of skilled jobs, on housing and an end to the demonising of the poor and vulnerable are vital to creating the fairer society in which people can flourish.

## Real alternative still vital

In this climate, the need for a real alternative to the fuzzy self-described social democracy of the SNP—an approach in retreat across Europe—is still vital.

The fact that the pro-independence left was squeezed on 5 May simply adds urgency to the task of winning the public argument on the real issues facing working class Scotland which are in turn essential if the engagement and energy of the Yes campaign is to be recaptured.

There is no alternative to this hard slog of work in communities, unions and in campaigns on poverty, against austerity and to protect the environment on issues such as fracking, if the alternative world which puts people and planet, so vital to the vast majority, is to be won.



# United action is effective action

by Roz Paterson

**MANY MOONS** ago, a fella came up to me at an SSP stall, examined our Free School Meals leaflet, and said, “Aye, you do very well, I like this campaign, but you’re too syndicalist for my tastes.”

And you know what? I didn’t even bother looking up “syndicalist” in my ‘Big Dictionary of Long Words Used by Male Marxists when Talking to Ladies’.

I just didn’t bother, folks. I just thought, “What a waste of a reasonably intelligent human being. All his political principles come to nothing, as they prevent him from having any impact, and serve only to keep him isolated.” Or maybe it was just, “What a tube!”; I forget which.

The point is, if you insist on political purity, you’re going to be on your own, and no one will care very much. The difference between one left-winger and another is a moot point in the grand scheme of things, and highlighting our differences only diminishes us.

What made the SSP so different from the left-wing political parties that preceded it, was that it overcame the splitist mentality. The idea being that, if we could agree on 80 per cent of our political ideas, it was good enough to be going on with. The other 20 per cent, well, we’d cross that bridge when we came to it.

## Energy and optimism

This (brief) uniting of the left, harnessed to the energy and optimism unleashed by the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, for all its flaws, and a new voting system that allowed smaller parties representation, plus the SSP’s pragmatic approach to policy-making, led to the biggest breakthrough of a socialist party in all of Europe. With six MSPs elected in 2003, our European comrades were watching.

Once in parliament, the SSP continued with the work that had made us our name; street-level campaigns that reached out to other, including non-political, organisations, such as the Free School Meals campaign, which garnered support from anti-poverty groups, health professionals, food campaigners, educationalists, as well as other political parties...and while the SSP bill failed in parliament, the idea stuck, leading to the provision of free school meals for all children in Primaries 1-3.

Ditto our campaign to abolish prescription charges, which came into law under the SNP government.



On our own, we hadn’t the heft. With like minds, we were unstoppable.

Alas, a decade of internal turmoil later, the SSP’s electoral progress has been checked, which only goes to prove the point; united action is effective action.

The Yes campaign showed this again to be the case, raising support for independence from the doldrums of the 20s, to within a whisker of majority. That didn’t happen through lots of little Yes groups all arguing that they were different from all the other little Yes groups because they were not, for instance, at all “syndicalist”.

Unfortunately, since 19 September 2014, what has been noticeable is the space opening up between the parties that stood shoulder-to-shoulder throughout the campaign, and I don’t mean the Tories and the Labour Party.

Almost before the Yes placards were in the gutter, the pro-independence movement seemed to have dissolved into its constituent parts, leaving the SNP in a position where it is all but in charge of Scotland’s destiny. Which is not good for democracy, and not good for independence.

We need to recognise our common cause with, for instance, the Greens, both in the cause of independence, and the environment. There is so much that we agree on, from Scottish sovereignty, to sustainable energy, to social justice. On issues like fracking, Trident, the ship-to-ship oil transfers in the Moray Firth, nothing divides us—except our political identity.

How much stronger and more influential would we be, if we worked together?

The Greens, riding high with six MSPs, may not think they need the left, but they do. For one, the Greens will always struggle

to penetrate beyond a middle-class vote; the persistent association with recumbent bikes and farmers’ markets will always make it hard for them to make breakthroughs in areas of acute poverty and social exclusion.

Second, the Greens have no real constituency, they remain an add-on vote, second to Tory, Labour, SNP and Lib Dem allegiances, and this is unlikely to change, because environmental policies remain, in most people’s eyes, secondary to fiscal and social issues. This shouldn’t be the case, of course. If we don’t address climate change, then our fiscal and social policies will be so many deck chairs on the Titanic.

## Radical, sustained change

The Greens have done well, electorally, but they have so far failed to make these issues urgent to the average person, to link environmental degradation with poverty of experience, loss of livelihood, poor health and narrowing futures. And failed to underscore the fact that, if we are to alter our course, things cannot stay as they are. A few green tweaks won’t save the planet; only radical, sustained change can do it, including an end to the capitalist model of increasing economic growth.

The left, as demonstrated by the SSP, are good at street-level, intelligent campaigns, that address real social issues, and lead to genuine political action. We’re also switched on to the need for change.

The reds and greens should not be in conflict, but supporting each other in our bid to make another Scotland possible.

Billy Bragg once described the dilemma of whether to vote “red for my class, or green for my children.” Well, time has turned the page, and we need to be able to do both.



# New project fear is blue on blue

by Colin Fox, SSP national co-spokesperson

**IF THE** polls are correct, the 'Remain' side's lead in the EU referendum is growing. If so this is a curious outcome because the UK Government's case is in many ways a poor one. Telephone polls give Remain an 8-12 per cent lead and the bookmakers (often a more reliable guide to voting intentions) now offer odds of 1/6 on a Remain vote with 'Leave' out to 4/1. These figures suggest the case for continued EU membership has not been successfully rebutted by the 'Brexiteers'.

One example of how ineffective the Leave camp has been was seen when TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady claimed equal pay, holiday pay, maternity rights, and trade union protection were all won thanks to Britain's EU membership.

This is of course nonsense.

## Political action

These reforms were won as a result of political action by working people not Brussels benevolence. The Equal Pay Act for example emerged from a strike by working class women sewing machinists at The Ford Motor Company in 1970 (portrayed in the film *Made in Dagenham*) before Britain even joined the Common Market as it was then.

But then the left arguments are not prominent in Leave propaganda. That message is dominated by those well-known trade unionists Boris Johnston and Michael Gove. Neither has the left exploited the Tory Government's appalling threat contained in a leaflet issued to every household, promising 'tough new restrictions on access to our welfare system for new EU migrants'.

**BUFFOON BORIS:**  
this referendum has  
become a conflict  
between two wings  
of the Tory Party



'Project Fear III'—the strategy employed by Cameron—is aimed at scaring the electorate about their economic prospects and the 'unknown consequences' of leaving the EU after 40 years. That this tactic appears to be working again is a depressing conclusion for it undoubtedly succeeded for the No side in September 2014 and for Cameron in the 2015 General Election.

This referendum has become, as most predicted it would, essentially a conflict between two wings of the Tory Party. Commentators refer to it as 'Blue on Blue' in reference to US military language used in Iraq and Afghanistan to describe conflicts where soldiers from their own side kill one another. The left for its part have been marginalised in this debate. Despite broad agreement that the EU is an anti-democratic bosses club neither 'Left Leave' nor 'Left Remainers' can be said to be influencing the debate very much. Nonetheless the question that divides us is can the EU be fundamentally changed?

"It's impossible for the EU to be a democracy," insisted the former BBC and Channel Four Economics commentator Paul

Mason on *Question Time* last week. "The EU is disintegrating," he added, "most east European governments are far right." He "will not be voting Brexit," he told us, because "that would give UKIP and the extreme right of the Tory Party what they want."

The 'Left Leave' camp accuse him of 'milking the cow and kicking over the bucket', reaching a conclusion at odds with his views on the nature of the EU. But they are themselves in danger of abstract thinking divorced from the real world. Left Leavers infer Brexit in and of itself offers a progressive alternative.

The EU, they point out, is in the grip of a neoliberal corporate elite but they omit to mention Britain is too. They suggest the EU has been responsible for privatising Britain's utilities these past 40 years, ignoring the fact that it was the Thatcher government that stoked the process worldwide.

The Scottish Socialist Party believes Britain should remain in the EU as it is the lesser of the two evils on offer on 23 June. We want to see a socialist Europe and insist working people and their political organisations across the EU

must roll up our collective sleeves and act together to democratise it. We need to get the EU to work on behalf of the 99 per cent not the corporate elite who make up the 1 per cent. No one is suggesting that is an easy task. But it remains central. So how do we do that?

The EU has been changed over and over again by various Treaties during its lifetime.

By and large these changes have been driven by the corporations and the right. Working people across Europe must therefore be prepared to struggle for democratic reforms. That is where democratic change must come from. We must develop far greater political co-ordination across the left.

## Internationalism

That spirit of internationalism is behind my visit to Madrid at the end of June to observe the Spanish general election at the invitation of Podemos.

My aim is to strengthen the links between the SSP and Podemos in the same way I did in 2015 when I went to Athens for the Greek general election at the invitation of Syriza. A great deal of water has gone under the bridge since then of course in Greece but the benefit for the SSP was invaluable.

### EDINBURGH PEOPLE'S FESTIVAL PUBLIC DEBATE

**'What should the EU  
look like, and how do  
we achieve that?'**

**Wed 8 June at 7pm**

**The Grassmarket Centre,  
Candlemaker Row,  
EDINBURGH**

**with Jim Sillars for 'Leave',  
Alison Johnstone MSP  
for 'Remain',  
and Neil Findlay MSP**

**All welcome**

# Workers strike

*by Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

**STRIKES WORK!** Workers don't walk out the door at the drop of a hat or on a whim, but when they're driven to the last resort of strikes in defence of their jobs, conditions and public services they provide, swift united action can often turn the most ruthless employers or hard nosed governments.

Recently in Scotland, several groups of workers have been compelled to 'down tools', as employers turn the screw in pursuit of cuts to the share of wealth going to the working class. And where determined, astute leadership is provided, workers have shown their willingness to fight back, often winning victories for wider society in the process.

One outstanding recent example was the outright victory for the Scottish Further Education college lecturers—organised in EIS-FELA—who planned 32 strikes in their long-running battle for equal pay, to end the criminal £10,000 pay gap between staff in different colleges or different towns doing exactly the same teaching job.

Within hours of the first day's solid strike, the employers caved in entirely, even to the extent of paying the 4,000 strikers for the day they had hit the streets and joined picket lines!

## **CalMac victory**

The fact the negotiating team were themselves lecturers was one key factor in winning, as they didn't just cave in like too many highly-paid union full-time officials often do.

Timing was key as the SNP government faced a potential electoral nightmare as strikes were set to straddle the Scottish parliament elections. So they intervened to end years of foot-dragging on equal pay and funded the settlement that means pay rises of up to 25 per cent for some.

United, determined strike action ended years of failure to establish national pay bargaining and equal pay under successive Labour-Lib Dem and SNP governments.

More recent, and even more significant, is the victory for the ferry workers' unions—in particular the RMT—in keeping the west coast ferries in the hands of the public sector: CalMac.

A lot of camouflage has been thrown over this issue by the SNP leadership and some of their more zealous and uncritical followers—

including denials that the SNP ever considered handing this lifeline service to the profiteering Serco. Likewise a lot of false claims for credit have been lodged by Scottish Labour MSPs.

So what really happened? Back in 2006, the then Labour-Lib Dem coalition put the Clyde and Hebrides ferries out to tender, using the excuse that they were legally forced to do so under EU regulations.

That claim has been exposed as bunkum, because under EU directives and rulings—including the Teckel Exemption—the government can keep services under public ownership on social and economic grounds. The same excuse was equally bunkum when it was warmed up and served by the SNP government in 2012, when they actually privatised the Northlink ferries—and subsidised the profit margins of Serco ever since.

And likewise over the past two years, as the SNP put the west coast ferries out to tender, with Serco and CalMac emerging as the two competitors for the £900million contract from 2016-24.

The employers and government refused to guarantee the jobs, conditions, pension rights and ferry services as the tender process dragged on. It took determined strikes by RMT members a year ago to force the SNP government to eventually concede promises on these issues—and to waken up to the political consequences of privatisation.

But still they refused to abandon the costly, unnecessary tendering, despite in-depth research commissioned by the RMT showing the irrefutable economic and social advantages of public ownership.

Both Nicola Sturgeon and Transport Secretary Derek McKay repeatedly trotted out the line that even if Serco won the bid "it will remain a public service". This cynical wordplay couldn't disguise the fact it would mean Serco raking in profit—on the basis of government subsidies of £110-120million a year for every one of the next eight years.

The persistent, high profile campaigning by the RMT and their allies—including the SSP—over the past year has hoisted the issue into public awareness.

Picket lines, protests outside the parliament, a postcard campaign targeting MSPs, and silent protests as Nicola Sturgeon addressed the STUC congress—all these and more pounded the SNP government to 'Keep CalMac Public'.

Post-election, they would have had to rely on the Tories to push through privatisation (Serco) as Labour seized the opportunity to embarrass the SNP—despite Labour's own baleful, shameful record on privatisation of transport services while in government at both Scottish and UK levels.

The SNP resisted demands by the RMT and their allies for the result of the tender to be announced pre-election, to allow the Scottish people to pass judgement.

As the announcement loomed at the end of May, the RMT stepped up the pressure, calling a demo outside parliament on 19 May. As RMT activists, SSP members and other trade unionists converged on Holyrood, Nicola Sturgeon headed off to Ardrossan harbour to announce CalMac had won the contract. A hugely welcome result.

Despite the government's ploys to disguise the reasons, this was clearly an outstanding, clear-cut victory for ferry workers through their union's determined campaigning and strike action, aided by those who showed them solidarity throughout. It certainly wasn't just the benign gift of a government!

As one of the RMT leaders of the CalMac battle told me at the celebratory lobby of the parliament on 19 May, "Make no mistake, this is a victory for the solidarity of workers and our supporters, like yourselves. Without that Serco shareholders would today be celebrating. We should celebrate this victory today, and then move on to the next big battles, which includes the process for the 2018 Northlink ferries contract."

## **Keep guards on trains**

Having won this outstanding victory for workers and island communities dependent on the lifeline ferries, the RMT now face a battle to stop the extension of Driver Only Operation trains.

This is a criminal attack on basic safety for staff and passengers on Abellio's ScotRail services, and must be stopped in its tracks before more people die or are seriously injured, like the passenger crushed and dragged onto the tracks recently in East Dunbartonshire.

And trade unionists, regardless of how they recently voted in the Scottish elections, should unite in demanding that there is no repeat of the SNP government's actions a few years ago, when they aided and abetted First ScotRail bosses in defeating the RMT



# back – and win!



members' strike against Driver Only Operations on the Airdrie-Bathgate line.

At that time, we exposed in the *Voice* how Alex Salmond's government pledged to underwrite First Group for any losses caused by strikes—thereby encouraging strikebreaking and an assault on safety by offering state subsidies to the enemies of the rail unions.

At more localised level, other groups of workers have won concessions from axewielding councils by turning their opposition into action—including strike action.

Teachers in Labour-run West Dunbartonshire Council have won a battle against educationally detrimental attacks on school organisation. They staged months of strikes, in the teeth of malicious attempts by the Labour council to incite opposition to the EIS members from parents—and defeated plans to abolish subject teachers being in charge of departments, which would have undermined kids' education.

In Glasgow City Council, a small group of CCTV workers recently won big improvements on pay after successive strikes demanding equal allowances with other equivalent jobs in Cordia, one of the city council's arms-length offshoots. School jannies are still battling against a Council hellbent on depriving these workers of thousands of pounds in allowances for the dirty jobs they do.

The Glasgow Labour administration agreed £131million cuts over two years, equivalent to 3,000 job losses. Their planned attacks include loss of three public holidays to existing and future staff, cuts to the ability of staff to get time off in lieu after working massive numbers of unpaid hours, and loss of annual leave for new recruits.

The Unison branch recently held a consultative ballot for industrial action—including strikes—to stop this butchery of conditions, coming on top of the slaughter of 4-5,000 jobs and vastly increased workload imposed since 2010.

## Prepare union struggles

Members have voted by clear majorities for action—including by 88 per cent for strikes amongst the sections of workers most directly threatened.

In response, the council has abandoned its plans to slash existing workers' public holidays, but are wanting to forge ahead with the rest of the cuts, hoping to divide and conquer by this concession. The Glasgow City Unison branch is seeking endorsement of a ballot for action from the union's Scottish leadership, rightly calling for unity against all cuts.

Whether at local council or Scottish public services level, workers and the communities that depend on them face harsh attacks as the

marauding Tories in Westminster gain succour from their alleged revival in Scotland.

This is where the response of both Labour and SNP councillors and MSPs are all too similar, contrary to the tribal divide between the two parties. With honourable exceptions, they huff and puff about Tory-imposed cuts... and then implement them.

They are prisoners of their own pro-capitalist ideology, lacking any vision of an entirely different system of society, even when they don the mantle of being 'social democrats'—essentially, wishing for a nicer version of capitalist profiteering!

The same approach applies to their failure to defy anti-worker privatisation demands from EU bureaucrats—even when those demands actually exist!

Workers and socialists need to prepare for battles ahead—and gain lessons and encouragement from the growing number of cases where workers in struggle have won concessions and even spectacular victories.

There's an urgent need to build coordinated workers' resistance with a vision of a Scotland where the wealth of the fourteenth-richest nation on earth is invested in decent wages, guaranteed high-value jobs, and expanded public services, rather than being devoted to the plunder of the working class and the environment for the profit of a minuscule minority.

# Scottish democracy needs a vibrant, diverse media

by Paul Holleran, Scottish Organiser  
National Union of Journalists

**A MAJOR** measure of any functioning democracy is the state of its media and anyone looking closely at the newspaper and broadcasting industry in this country would be rightly concerned about the current position of the fourth estate in particular.

Despite the efforts of the Scottish Newspaper Society to talk up the industry and minimise the facts about the downward spiral of sales and advertising revenues, we continue to see job cuts impacting on journalism across the country.

There are less than half the number of journalists in newsrooms of the Scottish indigenous broadsheets compared to ten years ago, while daily tabloids have also suffered from budgets being slashed. And at this time, only weeks after the Scottish parliamentary elections, many local newspaper offices around Scotland are the focus of disputes and industrial action ballots as members fight for better staffing levels and to protect hard won terms and conditions.

Amazingly as redundancies are decimating journalist posts, Newsquest Media Group are trying to cut sick pay entitlement and impose an extra two and half hours a week, while reducing holidays too.

## Job cuts

The Johnston Press experiment known as “Newsroom of the Future” has cut dozens of jobs and union members this week have refused to accept the newly established staffing levels as being unsustainable.

Unsustainable for the reasons of their health and safety, because of the increased stress of dealing with newly set workloads for each individual. The other stressor for journalists is the negative impact on the local identity of the titles because of the use of much more generic feature copy used across many titles to help compensate for lost jobs.

The refusal of companies like Newsquest to absorb falling profits without slashing budgets is leading to the demise of great Scottish titles such as *The Herald* and its sister titles.

Hopefully the management regime at Newsquest in Scotland will be successful in growing advertising and circulation revenues as they did in running Clyde & Forth

Publishing in recent years. However their London bosses appear more keen to follow in the footsteps of their US parent company Gannett and cut jobs rather than pursue growth to meet budgets.

Let’s be blunt, the positivity being pushed by the SNS and employers is correct in that the papers are still very profitable for their owners, but not pulling in as much dosh as they used to. That is may be the crux of the matter. How much money do papers have to make to encourage publishers to keep them alive?

At a public meeting a couple of years ago in Glasgow, organised by the NUJ and Co-Operative movement, the importance of press ownership was discussed. Paul Wood Managing Director at *The West Highland Free Press* told the captive audience that his company set a minimum target of 1 per cent profit per annum. Their view was that their title was a community asset, a cornerstone of their local democracy and not just about coin.

The NUJ Scottish Executive Council will be placing this issue firmly on it’s agenda for the next few years, with a view to exploring different models for press ownership and development in this country.

We have recently engaged with Robert McChesney, an American professor who specialises in the history and political economy of communication and the role the media plays in democratic and capitalist societies. Further discussion is planned with this founder of Free Press, a US media reform organisation and supporter of community owned media.

A real enigma facing the industry which is also having a major impact on staff, is the demand to not only to fill the pages of the print copies but the online editions of each title.

The inability of most publishers to establish an alternative and comparable revenue line by this route is a tragedy which is further undermining the industry. A lack of innovative ideas to attract advertisers and more readers has plagued print media despite much effort but not enough smart thinking.

The additional workload is obviously another obstacle facing journalists trying to produce the best product every day and week with a diminishing pool of resources.

It is clear that the numbers of journalists in each newsroom cannot be reduced any further without causing very serious damage to the substance of the titles and the health of staff.

The very existence of some local newspapers is at risk and steps need to be taken at government level to put in place mechanisms to protect all titles from closure.

It remains to be seen if there is anything resembling a considerable impact for print media through the recent announcement in the Westminster White Paper on BBC Charter Renewal. Certainly there could be opportunities for young people taking on Modern Apprenticeships in partnership between local papers and BBC stations. However staff working at BBC Scotland are more interested in how much extra resources will be provided as part of the licence fee agreement.

The NUJ submitted proposals putting forward arguments for an expanded news service across Scotland, including a new radio station to supplement Radio Scotland. The injection of money would lead to growth in news and current affairs, but also increased drama and music from Scottish writers and artistes.

## Pathetic settlement

The boost to Scottish culture and entertainment industries would be invaluable on many fronts, with a “made in Scotland” stamp on the new productions. However following another pathetic licence fee settlement negotiated between Westminster and BBC senior people, we were told “the Nations and regions will be getting nothing extra”.

Fortunately the Scottish Government, in partnership with Welsh and Northern Irish politicians lobbied ferociously for a better deal. We now wait in hope and expectation for the details of that new investment.

An expansion of journalistic jobs across BBC Scotland and a possible “Scottish Six” providing a new perspective on news and current affairs would be a great boost.

Although the amount of investment will not be anywhere near what was on the shopping list it will be a shot in the arm for a beleaguered industry. Broadcasting in Scotland should continue to be in a reasonably healthy condition particularly if STV plough on with their steady growth, developing further with stability and innovation the keywords.

There is still a lot of quality in the Scottish media but it is being undermined, thereby reducing the ability to make profits, and of course substantial amounts of those profits should be reinvested in a qualitative fashion.



# RMT: 'keep the guard on the train'

by a ScotRail driver

**THE RMT** union is balloting its ScotRail conductor members over Abellio's refusal to rule out the extension of Driver Only Operation (DOO) on services currently worked by on-train conductors (guards). At the moment around 44 per cent of ScotRail trains operate with DOO, the rest with conductors.

There are crucial differences between these two ways of operating trains, with dangerous implications for passengers if DOO is imposed.

Firstly, conductors are safety critical. In addition to revenue duties, they are trained in personal track safety and emergency procedures, including evacuating a train, taking charge of a situation where the driver has become incapacitated, operate the wheelchair ramp and are in sole charge of opening and closing the train doors. These trains cannot enter passenger service without a conductor.

The second member of staff on a DOO train is the ticket examiner. They perform the same revenue duties as a conductor, and have an important customer service role. They have no safety role but do operate the wheelchair ramp at unmanned stations. DOO trains can, and often do, run in passenger service without a ticket examiner on board.

But as long as someone opens and closes the doors, checks your ticket and points you in the right direction, what's the problem? The answer is that as long as nothing goes wrong there isn't one. Unfortunately though, as in every other workplace, things can and occasionally do go wrong, and on the railway the consequences of that can be tragic.

## Safety benefits

Real-life incidents and scenarios make abundantly clear the safety benefits of trains using conductors. A stop-short, whereby a driver mistakes the length of the train and stops at a point designated on the platform for a shorter unit, thus leaving a portion of the train not on the platform, is one of a driver's most dreaded nightmares.

They're rare but do happen. In this situation a DOO driver has around a single second to notice his/her mistake before releasing the doors and potentially risking the lives of passengers who could fall from the train. On conductor operated trains it is the job of the conductor to step onto the platform and ensure the train is correctly



positioned on it before opening the general doors, greatly mitigating this risk.

Rarer still, but again it does happen, are the occasions when a DOO driver has accidentally released the doors on the wrong side of the train, the non-platform side. In a perfect storm scenario, if this happened on a packed train which was full and standing with bodies unwittingly pressed against the internal 'Door Open' buttons on the non-platform side, and a train was entering that other platform (perhaps not even stopping there thus travelling at high speed), the consequences don't bear thinking about.

It's no thanks to DOO that a serious accident has not yet happened in this way but the potential remains for just such a deadly situation, impossible with a conductor performing a platform check before releasing the doors. On 11 March a woman was sexually assaulted on the 2300 Glasgow Queen Street to Airdrie DOO service, a six-car train comprising two separate three-car units coupled together.

DOO trains can and do run with no second staff member on board, often on late night weekend services as Train Operating Companies, when short-staffed and unable to cover all shifts, will change ticket examiners from late shift to early—purely in the interests of revenue collection, or profit as it's better known!

It's possible a ticket examiner was on that particular train and working on the other three-car unit, leaving the unfortunate vic-

tim with no ScotRail staff member to call upon for assistance.

Either way, this incident highlights a need for increased, not reduced, staff presence, with a member of staff guaranteed on each separate unit a compulsory requirement of Train Operating Companies.

## Vulnerable passengers

DOO discriminates against vulnerable female passengers, but also against the disabled, specifically the wheelchair-bound.

With drivers not allowed to use the on-train ramp and no guarantee whatsoever of a ticket examiner being on board, it's down to sheer chance if such passengers get to travel at all should their local station be one of the many which is unstaffed.

Under DOO it's a case of "Sorry, you'll have to get the next one, if there is one!", something which happens relatively often. Again this alone should, in any decent society, make the case for the abolition of DOO rather than its extension.

DOO is not a modern system of operating trains, regardless of any safety record companies may point to. Nor are the scenarios mentioned an exhaustive list of the problems, some potentially fatal, that it poses. It discriminates against the disabled, the vulnerable, and is potentially lethal.

The Scottish Socialist Party stands alongside the RMT's calls to "keep the guard on the train". The ballot closes on Tuesday 7 June.

# INTERNATIONAL

## June 26 Spanish elections:

*by Dick Nichols, in Barcelona*

**FIVE MONTHS** after the December 20 Spanish elections failed to produce a government, the country is again going to the polls in the most polarised election since the end of the Franco dictatorship in the late 1970s.

The December poll saw a surge in support for the radical force Podemos and the various regional coalitions in which it participates. However, the final vote for these new forces—born of the last five years of social and national struggles—still fell short of the score of the social-democratic Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), by 20.66 per cent to 22.01 per cent.

At the same time, the total vote to the left of the PSOE—including the United Left (IU), the Basque left-nationalist EH Bildu and the Catalan centre-left Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)—was 27.59 per cent. Also, the overall left-versus-right balance was 52.4 per cent to 47.6 per cent (53.6 per cent to 46.4 per cent if we exclude the Catalan nationalist right, which would support the formation of a left government in Spain if guaranteed a Scottish-style referendum for Catalonia).

With this result it was arithmetically possible to form a left government of PSOE, Podemos and IU, provided they received a minimum of support from Basque and Catalan nationalist forces. But that was never going to happen: the leadership of the Spanish-centralist PSOE is as hostile to participating in a left government it doesn't control as it is to acknowledging the right of self-determination of the nations that coexist in the Spanish state. After December 20, the PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez instead chose to negotiate a proposal for a "government of change" with the neoliberal party Citizens. Its right-wing vision for Spain is as a "normal" European power purged of corruption, labour market "rigidities" and independence-seeking nationalities.

### Left unity

In response, Podemos, its allies and IU voted down the formation of a PSOE-Citizens administration—and were rewarded with virulent PSOE abuse for being "accomplices" of the ruling People's Party (PP). For its part, the PP, still the largest force with 28.72 per cent after December 20, was never going to support a minority PSOE-Citizens administration that removed its hands from the levers of power.

New elections then became inevitable, and by early May Spain seemed set for a repeat of December 20. However, the refusal of the PSOE to negotiate in good faith with Podemos and IU focussed the attention of these parties on their core challenge—that of overtaking the PSOE and confronting it with the choice of taking part in a left government or becoming irrelevant.

Negotiations between the Podemos and IU leaderships then led to the proposal for a joint list in all those regions where the two parties had run separately in December. Their proposed ticket, called United We Can, was endorsed by 98 per cent of Podemos members and 84.5 per cent of IU members.

The United We Can platform ("Changing Spain: 50 Steps for Governing Together") outlines a practical program of measures addressing the key problems of Spanish society. Its immediate



**UNITED WE CAN:**  
left-wing electoral  
alliance Unidos  
Podemos, formed by  
Podemos, United  
Left, Equo and other  
left wing political  
parties, is contesting  
the general election  
in Spain

economic focus is boosted public expenditure focused on energy sustainability, job creation and poverty reduction, to be funded through a war on tax evasion and by reducing the European Union's deficit reduction targets for Spain.

Social reform measures include an end to evictions, guaranteed access to water and electricity and increased funding for education and health. Democratic reforms cover a referendum for Catalonia, a citizen debate on constitutional reform (which would confront issues like the monarchy and NATO membership), and a one-vote-one-value electoral system.

The platform includes comprehensive proposals on ecological issues (in part reflecting the participation in the alliance of the green party Equo), and international proposals including a European debt conference, recognition of Palestine, self-determination for the Western Sahara and international aid at 0.7 per cent of GDP.

The formation of United We Can has produced deep concern in the Spanish establishment. The average of opinion polls taken from its formation up until May 23 has the new coalition and its related alliances in second place at 24.1 per cent, as against the PSOE's 20.8 per cent. In terms of seats, United We Can and the PSOE are neck-and-neck (due to Spain's



# left government in sight?



rigged system of unequal electorates). This situation holds before the election campaigning in which Podemos excels has begun: in the December election, Podemos lifted its support from 15 per cent to 20 per cent in last two weeks before polling day. The key variable will be participation: the more people can be inspired to vote, the greater the support for the left. As a result, while the PP, PSOE and Citizens are each struggling to defend and extend their share of the vote, that fight is now constrained by the goal of stopping United We Can—guaranteeing a slanderous, red-baiting election campaign. For starters, the connections, real and imagined, of Podemos leaders with Venezuela's Bolivarian government are once again being scoured by squads of "investigative journalists" from the mainstream media.

On May 24, Citizens' leader Albert Rivera began his Spanish election campaign in the **Venezuelan** capital Caracas as guest of the anti-Bolivarian majority in the country's national assembly! This majority also invited Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias to appear before the assembly and explain his links with Bolivarianism.

On May 22, PP leader Pablo Casado denounced Podemos' "Caracas project,

**JOINT TICKET:**  
United Left's Alberto Garzón and Podemos' Pablo Iglesias – Unidos Podemos/'United We Can' could overtake the PSOE and confront it with the choice of taking part in a left government or becoming irrelevant

of empty shelves, of chemists where 200 people wait to buy aspirin, of communications media closed down, of business people with their businesses expropriated, of citizens with their second home expropriated." He added that the "useful vote" on June 26 could only be for the PP so as to avoid Podemos "beating the PSOE and the PSOE having to support him [Iglesias] as prime minister, as it has done in the councils where they govern together, like Madrid and Barcelona."

Not to be outdone, Sánchez said on May 24 that the radical formation had to explain the financing of an associated foundation that had supposedly received Venezuelan funding. He also required Iglesias to explain why he had called Basque left-nationalist leader Arnaldo Otegi a "political prisoner".

Sánchez had previously rejected a Podemos offer to run a PSOE-IU-Podemos joint ticket for the Senate as a way of breaking the PP's absolute majority in Spain's upper house.

The rise of United We Can has forced the three pro-establishment parties into an anti-left sacred alliance. However, the risk they run is that United We Can's able leaders, Iglesias and IU's Alberto Garzón, will be able to expose the underlying motivation of their fear campaign—to frustrate any change that would make Spain's economic elites pay for improving the lives of the millions afflicted by the economic crisis.

If United We Can's campaign succeeds against this aggression (and its activists mobilise as needed) the PSOE will have to choose—grand coalition with the PP (and eventual political oblivion) or left government on terms set by United We Can.

• *Dick Nichols is the European correspondent of Australia's Green Left Weekly and of Links—International Journal of Socialist Renewal. A more detailed version of this article will soon appear on its website*

## Holyrood must axe offensive behaviour at football law

by Liam McLaughlin

**WITH THE** Holyrood election now over, and the hurt of a bruising night for the left and progressive forces involved with the pro-independence campaign of 2014 starting to dissipate, one significant silver lining can be taken from the make up of our parliament for the next five-year term.

There's an inbuilt majority against the only act ever to pass through the Scottish Parliament without any form of cross party support—the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications Act.

Railroaded through the parliament in the months following the SNP majority win of 2011, the Offensive Behaviour Act was the SNP and Police Scotland response to a series of incidents surrounding football and the targeted and bigoted campaign of bombs, bullets and threats to the lives of prominent Celtic supporters and staff as the underlying anti-Irish racism that still exists in large parts of the West of Scotland bubbled over into media limelight.

### Deeply flawed

The act however was deeply flawed from its inception, sold on a pack of spin and deceit that it was brought into force to deal with sectarianism in Scotland, despite the word sectarianism failing to appear in the entire legislation and existing laws already covering aspects of sectarian and religiously motivated bigotry and hatred.

In practice, the Act in fact criminalises anything upon which a "reasonable person" would deem to be offensive.

This can range from non-discriminatory political expression like declaring support for a united Ireland, to as far as a fan at a match swearing in the crowd towards opposing fans or players.

To draw the act to its (il)logical conclusion could see both sides of the debate on upcoming EU membership or the Scottish Referendum of 2014 brought through the courts for airing those views at or in the vicinity of a football match.

The scope of the act is so wide and unspecified that there doesn't actually have to

**AXE THE ACT:** the ugly scenes that followed the recent Scottish Cup Final were all offences covered by existing legislation in relation to crowd control and common assault – they make no case for the retention of the Offensive Behaviour at Football Act



be anyone reporting to be offended in order for a conviction or charge to be brought, and the term deemed an offence does not actually have to be at a football match but can be on the way to a game or even in a pub that happens to be showing the match.

Anyone associated with the footballing world or the fight for the protection of civil liberties since its inception will testify to the long lasting damage the Act has caused in the relationship between largely working class young football fans and how they view the newly centralised, aggressive and unaccountable police force and also the wider justice/legal system in this country.

With an upcoming private members bill seeking to repeal the Act, it can only be hoped that this illiberal, deeply flawed legislation is killed off once and for all and that there shall be no need for a Fans Against Criminalisation campaign next season.

At the time of writing however, *Voice* readers will be aware of the aftermath of the recent Scottish Cup final and the dreadful scenes which accompanied the final whistle which has reportedly seeing players and staff of Rangers FC assaulted on the pitch.

Let me be clear that these scenes are embarrassing and shameful for Scottish Football, but let us also be clear they make no case for the retention of the Act.

These events occurred with the Act in place, and were in fact all offences cov-

ered by existing legislation in relation to crowd control and common assault.

A much deeper analysis, particularly for those of us in the socialist movement must take place to attempt to draw wider conclusions and answers to the age old questions of why working class people's relationship with football is so often an emotional release from the strains and pressures of everyday life in austerity Britain and why our relationship as a nation with alcohol is so deeply entrenched and so fundamentally damaging.

### Damaging legislation

In the 17 years since our parliament's inception, the Offensive Behaviour at Football Act is the single worst piece of shoddy, short term and deeply damaging piece of legislation to be enacted from inside its walls. The upcoming months give us a chance to blow the final whistle on the Act and re-evaluate our entire strategy in the fight against bigotry, sectarianism and anti-Irish racism which still exist in modern day Scotland and which scars our great nation so profoundly.

A problem I believe that education, inclusivity and community building will solve, not short term, flawed legislation dreamt up and forced through in the aftermath of an election.

It's time to #AxeTheAct and lead that fight.