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Scottish Socialist Voice

DITCH THE UNION JACK FLOPS



BITTER TOGETHER: Lib Dems, the Labour Party and the Conservatives join forces to keep Scotland under Westminster control

VOTE YES FOR REAL CHANGE

by Ken Ferguson

AS the long and arcane debate about the technicalities of the independence poll draws to a close and the real debate opens, it is clear that a Yes vote is there to be won.

As the *Voice* went to press, the unionists were crowing as the latest poll appeared to show 53 per cent favouring the UK to 32 per cent for independence.

However, a closer look confirms the Scottish Socialist Party's view that the vital battle

for a Yes vote will be won if fought for as part of a vision of a radically-changed Scotland that takes on the glaring inequalities of today's Britain.

The poll shows 43 per cent effectively backing independence in the shape of maximum powers for Edinburgh in a context of daily 'shock' stories from a largely unionist press with synthetic scares from EU membership to sinister "extremists" burning union jacks.

Back in the real world where unionists have, on the latest

poll, a ten point lead based on uncertainty about living standards, the self same unionists are about to inflict mass scale misery in the form of spending cuts on those doubtful voters.

This is unlikely to consolidate support for staying in austerity Britain.

The truth is that Scotland is to the left of the pro-business consensus which is supported by all the anti-independence parties and offers wage freezes, sackings and slashed services from here to the far horizon.

In this context it is a serious error to attempt to portray independence as a kind of 'UK Lite', complete with the monarchy, low tax for fat cats, NATO membership and continued participation in foreign wars.

Either the case is made for independence as a tool for radical change, breaking with the failed British model and offering an alternative progressive vision, or the Yes camp risks offering a no-change case which will draw the response - 'why bother?'

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'WOMEN FOR INDEPENDENCE' SET FOR LAUNCH

WOMEN For Independence are a newly formed, grassroots, broad-based campaigning group. We aim to ensure that there is space for women's voices in the independence debate. We are going to develop ideas about the kind of Scotland women want to live in, by *listening* to women.

We are holding our launch event at the Golden Lion Hotel in Stirling from 12-2pm on Sunday 30 September.

All pro-independence women are welcome at the event but spaces are limited, so contact natmcgarry@gmail.com to request a ticket. It promises to be a bit different from the launch events that have been seen so far. There will be music, poetry, women's voices and laughter - and a few surprises.

• *Get involved at:*
womenforindependence.org
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Public pack SSP indy meetings

FROM Paisley to Edinburgh and on to Glasgow, the SSP held the first of a series of public meetings in the run up to the Independence Referendum.

Questions ranged from North Sea Oil to NATO and showed a real thirst to debate the real issues rather than gossip.

The meetings started in Paisley on Monday night

where the Scottish Socialist Party's Campbell Martin and Colin Fox spoke eloquently on the case for an independent socialist Scotland.

In Edinburgh, a packed, standing-room-only meeting keenly listened to the words of SSP co-spokesperson Sandra Webster, Campbell Martin and John McAllion. Members of other parties

were present, and many others who had not yet made up their mind how to vote, but wanted to hear more about how independence could work.

In Clarkston on Wednesday, Lindsay Webster spoke about her independence vision and the fairer society she wanted as a young person.

See the next issue of the *Voice* for further events.



BREATH OF FRESH AIR: the SSP's public meetings on independence are attempting to reach out to the 40 per cent of Scots that the Yes campaign claims are undecided about which way to vote

DITCH THE UNION JACK FLOPS

• *Continued from page 1*

The SSP has supported independence since its formation, not for its own sake but because we believe Scots will be socially, economically and culturally better off with independence.

Our vision is of a Scottish republic pursuing socialist policies which put people before profit and break with the failures of neo-liberalism and war backed by the Better Together parties of Labour, Liberals and Tories.

Such a Scotland would take our natural resources and key services, such as railways, into public hands and use them not to fill the wallets of city speculators but to meet the needs of the people of Scotland.

We would break with Britain's nuclear weapons and the aggressive NATO alliance's wars across the globe, making Scotland a beacon for all opposed to the endless war agenda.

It is only through linking the Yes campaign to a real vision of

change, social justice and peace that people will be energised to campaign and vote for independence and real change.

In the dawn of today's capitalist world, Scotland was a powerhouse of ideas that drove change.

With the alliance of the demand for independence and real change, we can be so again, and break with the failed policies of fat cat profits and wars to shape a green socialist future of equality, peace and solidarity.

The prize is there to be won.

BOSSES WANT TO PRIVATISE WATER

Roz Paterson takes a look

SO the CBI Scotland chief Iain MacMillan thinks it would be a jolly wheeze to privatise Scottish Water, does he?

It seems he doesn't care for the idea of public money being squandered on lifeline services and life-supporting commodities.

After all, tax-payers' cash is surely ring-fenced for bailing out banks, right?

Hmm, well, perhaps in CBI world. In the real world, as such people are so fond of saying, things are a little different.

Water, unlike, for instance, over-the-knee socks or tinned custard, is one of life's little essentials.

Monopoly

Unlike the afore-mentioned items, clean water is a natural monopoly and thus does not fit easily into the market system. Though this tiny fact did not discourage the Thatcher and Major governments from privatising other such natural monopolies as the electricity and gas utilities, and British Rail. Oh, and introducing the internal market into the NHS. I could go on...

Back to water, which is something we in Scotland tend to take for granted, especially if we've got it gushing down our interior walls, or have just watched it dissolve our potato harvest.

Despite its abundance at our latitude, globally, water is coming



IAIN MACMILLAN: Scottish CBI chief wants to see rivers of profit via the household water bill price rises that would follow privatisation

under pressure from a rising population and ever-increasing consumption.

Societally, we should concentrate our minds on how to improve the supply of fresh drinking water, and find ways to use less of it.

Privatising the water utility is one way of ensuring that won't happen.

Take the unedifying example of England and Wales, where water was privatised in 1989.

In the decade that followed, household water bills rose 40 per cent and, guess what, the water

didn't get any better! Actually, it didn't even stay as good.

An EU research project, called Watertime, found that while the publicly owned and controlled water utility in Denmark recorded an annual leakage in Copenhagen of 4 per cent, and the public water utilities in Paris and Milan had an annual leakage of 10 per cent, the UK's super-efficient, privatised water utilities of Severn Trent and Thames Water had annual leakage of 26 and 32 per cent respectively.

How could that happen? Be-

cause the mechanics of privatisation make it "more profitable to invest in new infrastructure" — where they may be entitled to subsidies, grants, tax relief — "or to sweat existing resources, than repair or maintain their infrastructure," according to an academic study conducted by a team at St Andrew's University (ECAS - Cooper et al).

Not only that, but the utilities were run for the benefit of shareholders, rather than consumers. And the regulator, ostensibly established to ensure that water prices didn't rocket through the stratosphere or raw sewage start spurting from the taps, was there to make sure it was so.

OFWAT's main duty has been to ensure that private companies can make enough profit to fund their functions, such as paying dividends to shareholders. Consumer protection is absolutely not their *raison d'être*.

Risk

Even price-capping, which occurs every five years, is not quite what it seems.

These price caps come at a social cost, as profits are protected simply by putting people out of a job, or reducing spending on maintenance, hence Severn Trent and Thames Water's alarming incontinence.

And risk? They don't know the meaning of the word! Consider the case of, say, a cryptosporidium outbreak in the water.

Who pays? Why, you and me! With our health, if we're unlucky, and our publicly-funded health service, even if we're one of the lucky ones.

Scotland has so far resisted water privatisation, not because we're illiterate savages who want to stop selfless entrepreneurs create wealth for our own damned good, but because, with examples like England's and Wales' to warn us, we'd be mad not to.

Let's keep up the good work.

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LABOUR'S 'BETTER TOGETHER' LINKS A GROWING MILLSTONE

by John McAllion

HISTORY provides us with many examples of popular fronts. Leon Blum's Popular Front Government elected in France in 1936 was one.

The Government of the Spanish Republic that held power until Franco's fascists destroyed it by waging civil war was another.

There was even an attempted popular front in Britain against the pre-war national government's appeasement of Hitler.

What characterised all of these alliances was that they were broad coalitions directed against the right and dominated by the left. Socialists and communists greatly outnumbered the few Liberals and rebel Tories that gathered under their banner. They were also supported in the 1930s by the Communist International.

Deviant

What, then, are we to make of the latest attempt at a deviant form of popular front politics as manifested by the British "Better Together" campaign?

The leadership of a Labour Party that historically shunned popular front politics with socialists and communists to its left, now embraces the Coalition parties to its right in defence of what Alistair Darling calls "their shared political, economic and cultural institutions".

There is no absolute need for an all-embracing umbrella group on the No side of the referendum campaign. No such umbrella group existed in the 1979 referendum on a Scottish Assembly.



ETON MESS: as part of the 'Better Together' No campaign, Labour are siding with the likes of Nick Clegg, George Osborne and ex-Bullingdon posh-thug club member, PM David Cameron

The official labour movement Yes campaign in support of Labour's Assembly back then kept its distance from SNP and Tory Yes campaigns alike. It only cooperated officially with the STUC and the Co-operative Party.

Even the Labour vote No campaign refused to appear on platforms with No-voting Tories. Its leader, Tam Dalyell, was quoted at the time as not wishing to be seen "ganging up with the Tories... that would have been the death of us politically".

With the Assembly referendum campaign conducted on the eve of the 1979 general election, no-one standing in a Scottish constituency wanted to be seen as on the same side as Thatcher's Tories.

Embracing Cameron, Clegg, Osborne et al in defence of the union is therefore a high risk strategy for today's Scottish and British Labour leadership. In just two years of government, the Coalition partners have

become hate figures in Scotland. Moreover, between now and the referendum in the autumn of 2014, the bulk of their cuts announced over the past two budgets will begin to take effect.

The Welfare Reform Act will begin to bite with community care grants and crisis loans to the poor slashed. Housing Benefit changes will hammer claimants deemed to be under-occupying their homes. Reform of DLA will cut the disability living allowance budget by 20 per cent.

General strike

Public spending cuts will bring trade unionists onto the streets in opposition to austerity. A general strike against the Coalition will be seriously considered for the first time since 1926.

Meanwhile, as part of a self-styled patriotic all-party alliance, Labour politicians will be campaigning side by side with the authors of all of this misery.

The public sector pay freeze and the attack on public sector pensions will play second fiddle to the defence of a British identity shared with the Tories.

Mounting unemployment and poverty will be ignored as they wax lyrical in support of an economic recession Labour describes as the world's "most successful single market".

'Better Together' will ring increasingly hollow as workers across Scotland experience the horrors of an austerity programme designed and delivered by Britain.

As the right-wing misery mounts, the prospect of a Scotland forever free of Tories will become ever more attractive. Labour will be left to explain why they cling to a constitutional settlement that during 83 years of universal suffrage on these islands has delivered 59 years of right-wing governments - 72 years if you include 13 years under New Labour.

Some things are beyond justification.

Independence must mean real change

by Campbell Martin

THE Scottish Socialist Party and the Scottish National Party share the goal of restoring to Scotland the status of a normal, independent nation.

As democrats, members of the SSP will work with the SNP to build the Yes vote in the 2014 Independence Referendum.

But we reserve the right to highlight our very different vision of what an independent Scotland should look like.

Back in the early and mid-1970s, political opponents banded the SNP as 'Tartan Tories'. The party had begun to win parliamentary constituencies and was securing those victories with the support of Conservatives who felt comfortable voting for the moderate, centre-right SNP.

Tory-free zone

However, just a few years later, more left-leaning political activists saw the benefits to Scotland of independence and joined the SNP, taking the party away from the centre-ground.

By the 1980s young SNP members talked openly of socialism and of an independent Scotland being a Tory-free zone.

With the adoption of social democratic policies and a



RIGHT ROYAL FOLLY: the SNP wants an independent Scotland to retain the Queen as Head of State

realignment to the centre-left, even former members of the Labour Party, such as Jim Sillars and Alex Neil, were swayed to the cause.

By the late 1990s, though, the SNP again began to drift towards the centre of the political spectrum, and with the election as party leader of John Swinney in 2000 that drift became a charted-course with the engine on full throttle. Even Swinney's resignation in 2004 did not alter the SNP's about-turn back to a centre-right position.

Today, the SNP is very much pro-big business. The

party argues that an independent Scotland should slash Corporation Tax, which would simply allow companies to make bigger profits, while enshrining poverty-level wages for Scottish workers.

The SNP wants an independent Scotland to retain the Queen as Head of State, with Scots continuing to fund the opulent lifestyles of the royal family.

Corrupt system

The SNP's independent Scotland would allow the Bank of England to set monetary policy and would fully embrace the corrupt capitalist economic system that continues to keep thousands of ordinary Scots living in poverty.

The SNP's strategy, as we approach the 2014 referendum, is to portray independence as something that won't result in change for Scots. Keep the Queen: keep the Bank of England: keep the pound: keep the European Union: and join the

nuclear-armed North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

But, in terms of independence, the SNP is not the only game in town.

The Scottish Socialist Party has a very different vision of an independent Scotland.

Quite frankly, if things are not going to change, what is the point? We want change - change for the better.

The SSP wants a Scotland where the corrupt capitalist system is replaced by socialism, and where the interests of ordinary Scots are put before the profits of multi-national corporations.

The Scottish Socialist Party supports an independent Scotland because independence is the catalyst that will give us all the powers we need to tackle the bread-and-butter issues that affect every one of us, every day of our lives.

The SSP supports independence so that we can radically transform Scottish society and build a better, fairer country for us all.

“The SNP is not the only game in town, in terms of independence. The SSP has a very different vision of an independent Scotland. Quite frankly, if things are not going to change, what is the point?”

HILLSBOROUGH: THE TRUTH AT LAST - NOW DEMAND JUSTICE!

by *Richie Venton, Liverpool supporter, Merseyside regional organiser of the socialist organisation Militant 1980-1992*

WORDS can only begin to hint at what the Hillsborough Independent Panel's Report signifies. A victory for the truth over the pernicious lies poured out by police chiefs, press and politicians - who tried to frame the 96 who died that terrible day in April 1989. A victory for the superhuman tenacity, courage and heroism of the victims' families and other fans who have fought for justice for 23 years.

Overwhelming relief and vindication, tinged with renewed sadness, for the families of the 96 who perished alongside a new wave of bitter outrage at the revelation 41 of the 96 could still be alive today, but for the incompetence of the police chiefs, which meant only two of 48 ambulances that arrived actually reached the pitch.

Police savagery

A renewed unity and sense of their own strength in challenging the authorities - family campaigners, all Liverpool fans, and indeed the whole city's working class population. Fury, and for some, utter disbelief at the blatant, corrupt cover-up by police chiefs, as they crudely doctored documents and witness statements - with successive Tory and Labour governments aiding and abetting their inhuman smearing of the dead.

At the time, in articles in the socialist press, I branded the initial West Midlands police inquiry into the South Yorkshire policing operation at Hillsborough as being a case of the Devil investigating the actions of Satan.

Some of us had lived through the savage class brutality of the Tories during the miners' strike four years



UNFORGIVABLE: police, press and politicians tried to frame the 96

before Hillsborough - with Thatcher's use of South Yorkshire and other police forces as a well-fed, well-paid, government militia that treated working class people as scum, rampaging in the pit villages.

But even veteran socialists are still gobsmacked at the crudely blatant corruption of the police, who altered 164 police statements.

They framed the dead!

The root cause of this human tragedy was the way the football and police authorities regarded working class people as sources of vast profit, but also inherently violent hooligans. The clubs failed to re-invest their profits in ground safety and comfort for the people who made the pools companies £661million profits from football the year before Hillsborough alone.

Many of the grounds were more like clapped out cowsheds, prisons with their perimeter fences, rather than palaces of entertainment. Hills-

borough, capacity 54,000, had no proper medical facilities. They fenced fans into pens, more accurately cages, like a sub-human species. The police were drilled to treat them with contempt, and make arrests, rather than cooperate with supporters' organisations in protection of crowd health and safety.

As the crush began, the police stopped ambulances getting onto the pitch, falsely telling them that it wasn't safe as the fans were rioting.

That's why many of the 41 who could have survived died that day. Rows of police, three deep, were lined up outside the cages at the goalmouth where people were dying. Eyewitnesses at the time told us how police ignored pleas for help: shoving the fence back into position when fans desperately tried to smash it down as a means of escape; refusing to help a child gasping for breath who was passed over the heads of the fans; trun-

cheoning a group of fans who managed to get onto the pitch to try and rip down the railings.

This callous failure to act as a rescue service largely lay in the previous training of police as unthinking, obedient servants of the police chiefs, who in turn deployed their forces on behalf of the Tories against mining communities and disaffected young people, and whose attitude to Liverpool working class people in particular was steeped in class hatred.

It is no mere coincidence that the police mercilessly doctored the evidence in order to smear Liverpool fans and hide their own scandalous role. And Thatcher's Tory government's fingerprints are all over this monstrous frame up. Liverpool was an inspiration to workers across the UK and beyond - and the target of ruthless revenge by the Tories and their media lickspittles.

Tory hatred

They portrayed Liverpool people as violent dole-cheats, mindlessly militant, worthy of being taught a harsh lesson. They discussed in the Tory Cabinet about organising the "managed decline" of Liverpool - something pursued through systematic workplace closures. And the demonisation of Liverpool's working class came out in its full inglorious venom after Hillsborough.

The press didn't even have the decency to wait until the dead were buried before spewing out their vitriol. A Tory MP, Irvine Patnick, passed The Sun a packet of vicious lies, peddled by police chiefs, which the Murdoch rag gleefully published. This accused Liverpool fans of being "drunken animals", of "urinating on the dead and police", of "mugging dead bodies", of "assaulting firefighters".

The report confirms what we argued in 1989: this was a monstrous lie on a monumental scale - de-

signed to blame the victims for their own deaths and stop awkward questions being asked about the role of the FA, and police. Successive inquiries and successive Tory and Labour governments buried the truth. But they reckoned without the Hillsborough Justice campaigners, who were adamant in their demand 'Never again - justice for the 96'.

This victory for working class people in exposing the truth should not be the end of the matter. Apologies without justice mean nothing. The Hillsborough families are rightly demanding the reopening of the inquests. That, and the call for prosecutions of those who were in charge of this man-made disaster, are the next steps towards justice.

The apologies from The Sun editor of the time, some police chiefs (though even now, not all of them), Boris Johnson and David Cameron are too little, too late. They had little choice but to apologise, given the devastating impact the truth revealed. But already there are signs this a one-day wonder of apologies, swiftly followed by days of distraction with stories of tasteless, intrusive pictures of topless Royals. For the sake of those who perished, they must not succeed.

Monument to the 96

And I stand by the words I wrote in April 1989:

"They are desperate to cover up the real culprits - the police, the Tory ministers, the football clubs who just want our ticket money. They do nothing about the clapped out, unsafe grounds, which are part of the whole rotten free enterprise system which the Tories and their press uphold... The unity of working class people in this hour of sorrow cuts across the rivalries which big business fosters in order to reap profits..."

"But the collective grief does not prevent the collective rage. One day the silent, choked up rage of these two million people will be turned on the authorities responsible for this needless suffering and death. They will erect the best possible monument to the fallen 96 - a society where men, women and children can work, rest and play without fear of poverty or death for profit's sake."

South Yorkshire Police cover-up underway while people lay dying

by Mairtin Gardner,
Evertonian

ON Wednesday 12 September, the beginning of the full disclosure of what really happened at Hillsborough started.

Some of the details that many of the families, Liverpool supporters, other football fans and friends we'd long 'known' were released.

I sat in work in tears reading some of the Hillsborough Independent Panel's findings...

I cast my mind back to that day. On 15 April 1989 I went to an FA Cup semi-final in Birmingham. Everton won 1-0 against Norwich - I should have been bouncing home, another Wembley Cup final. Sadly though, news from the other semi-final at Hillsborough cut that celebration rather short. The horror of what happened that day at Hillsborough is well known to many.

But the real story, as many of us already 'knew' was kept quiet. What came out that Wednesday must have surprised and horrified even the most determined of people.

That South Yorkshire Police lied about what happened at Hillsborough on that day came as no surprise to anyone. But the sheer scale of the cover-up and indeed corruption exposed by the Hillsborough Independent Panel was and still is stunning in its spread.

The cover-up was underway whilst people were still dying.

Unsurprisingly, Cameron and co, whilst apologising for the cover-up, clearly see this as a good day - they want this to be seen as their openness their concern and care.

But what that masks is the role of Cameron's predecessor, Thatcher, in this. Their desire to have the Taylor Report 'get it right' is there for all to see. Clearly, that she sent Douglas Hurd to speak to Taylor to put 'their side' shows they knew more.

What more they knew is still a mystery, but the idea that a cover-up involving hundreds, with such senior police had no political backing is frankly laughable. This was the South Yorkshire Police who, along with several other police forces,

were part of Thatcher's army of thuggery on the miners' strike picket lines.

This is the police force that committed acts of brutality at Orgreave during that strike. As a result of Orgreave, 95 pickets were charged with riot, unlawful assembly and similar offences after the battle.

A number of these were put on trial in 1987, but the trials collapsed, all charges were dropped and a number of lawsuits were brought against the police for unlawful arrest. South Yorkshire Police later agreed to pay £425,000 compensation and £100,000 in legal costs to 39 pickets in an out of court settlement.

Disgrace

The smears from that day echo like the disgrace which is the South Yorkshire Police involvement at Hillsborough.

Many, myself and many readers no doubt included, have no trouble seeing the cover-up of Hillsborough as being Thatcher and the Tories' pay-back for the miners strike, especially Orgreave.

The findings of the report are not the end, they are the disgracefully late beginnings, the original inquest must be struck from the records, new inquests based not on the appalling '3.15pm cut-off' must be started and given the clear evidence of tampering with evidence as regards the statements charges must follow.

Only then will the families and friends of those who died and of those who survived that horrible day be able to begin to feel they've been listened to.

That it took 23 years for their voices to be heard will remain forever a disgrace and forever a blatant example of the class nature of the society we live in.



THATCHER AND HURD: did the cover-up by hundreds of police, including senior officers, have political backing from the Tories?

by *Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace
organiser*

WORKERS NEED INDEPENDENCE AND SOCIALISM

AS workers march in favour of Scottish independence on 22 September, they are also gearing up for a fight with the Westminster but on the STUC march and rally in Glasgow on 20 October. The battles for jobs, pensions, and rights at work are intertwined with the fight for Scottish self-rule. There is no contradiction between wanting Scottish independence and maximum workers' unity in action in pursuit of decent conditions.

The dire warnings from the anti-independence 'Bitter Together' - funded by the Tories and big business, fronted by Labour's Alistair Darling (of the rich) - about workers being threatened with catastrophe unless they remain part of the British Union is a sick joke, but a source of confusion amongst workers, particularly when some union leaders echo these doom-laden claims.

British certainties

The Westminster Coalition is doing what any capitalist government does; it is defending the profit margins of the capitalists and bankers by savagely cutting the share of national wealth that workers and their families get in wages, public services, benefits and pensions. Wages as a share of annual wealth output (GDP) has collapsed, and is set to fall further as wages fail to match inflation - that's the 'safe', guaranteed certainty of continued capitalist rule in the dis-United Kingdom.

Cameron and Clegg have reaffirmed their intention of increasing the state retirement age, initially to 68, but eventually even later, and of forcing workers to pay more, for longer, for far less pension on retirement. Osborne and co are hell-bent on slashing public sector spending, services, jobs, wages and benefits for the most vulnerable people - even though this scorched earth policy has actually increased national debt by a further £19 billion since they unleashed their class war.



STRIKE! after the 20 October march, the STUC should prepare a one-day coordinated strike, which could trigger UK-wide action

That is the nightmare future - the certainty - under continued rule by the Westminster razor gang. And frankly it doesn't matter much whether the Tory/LibDem Coalition are in office, or New Labour - who in any case are courting the hated Lib Dem traitors like besotted teenagers, hunting after a possible future coalition with them.

The same 'Bitter Together' poster boy, Alistair Darling, is on record warning that if Labour had been re-elected in 2010 they would be carrying out public sector cuts far deeper than those of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. The same 'carry on the cuts' message was repeated by Labour's two far-from-Red Eds - Miliband and Balls - at the recent TUC.

So those trade union leaders who seek shelter from the Tories in the house of New Labour are suffering short memories, and dangerously misleading their members.

Far from being "better together" in a capitalist Britain, workers face prolonged assaults on what modest gains past generations of workers won by hard struggle - regardless of which pro-capitalist party occupies 10 and 11 Downing St.

Instead of trade union leaders hankering after the benefits of being part of the British Union - rooted in past labour movement conquests like the NHS, improved housing, greater access to education, and the welfare state - they need to face reality: the NHS, public sector housing, 'free' education

and welfare benefits are being systematically dismantled, by successive Tory and Labour governments.

At the recent TUC congress, union leaders rightly denounced the Coalition, agreed to coordinate action in defence of pensions, pay and jobs, and even agreed the call by the Prison Officers' Association to investigate the possibility of a general strike. These union leaders articulated the heartfelt fury of millions of workers at how the Cameron cabal is treating us, and reflected the desire for unity in action. Such fine words now need to be translated into deeds.

March and strike

The welcome decision of the STUC to call a demo in Glasgow on Saturday 20 October whilst the TUC holds one in London should be the springboard for marching together and then striking together.

Union leaders now need to be pressed by members to seriously prepare at least a one-day coordinated strike, similar to the 1.5 million strong action on 30 November last year. It would be best if that action took place across the whole of the UK, against the UK government. But failing that, the Scottish TUC should at least lead the way by spearheading such action in Scotland, challenging the British TUC to join them and implement their own radical words.

But in seeking to convince trade unionists (and workers yet to join the unions) to fight back, trade

SNP's NATO vote close

by David McKenzie,
Trident Ploughshares

AS I write, it appears that the NATO vote at the SNP national conference could go either way.

From one perspective, whichever way the party decides, the SNP leaders have given us all an unintended favour in raising the NATO question just when they did.

They have inadvertently sparked off the whole debate about an independent Scotland in the wider world.

One of the main arguments employed by pro-NATO people within the SNP and beyond is that actually being in NATO will give us a better chance of getting rid of Trident.

The reasoning, such as it is, appears to be that if we appease the US by being in the alliance then they will apply pressure on the rest of the UK to allow us to remove the nuclear weapons.

Revealing

However speculative and just plain daft that is in itself, it's the thinking behind the argument that is both revealing and worrying. The key word is "allow". It is clear that what is envisaged is not a genuinely autonomous country making critical decisions for itself, but a rather a submissive client state that must go cap in hand to the big folks for favours.

And what applies to Trident will also be true of other issues. The powers that drive NATO will also be keen that an independent Scotland does not opt out of the neo-liberal economic framework and will be prepared to allow its sea and land to be used as the platforms for NATO training, (as at Cape Wrath) and for its military adventures.

The mind-set that is behind the pro-NATO stance involves a strange confusion about what independence and autonomy might mean. Everyone under-

stands that absolute independence is both impossible and undesirable. The various crises we face make this clear. We have vital resources in common, the sea, the atmosphere, the depletable elements.

A war in one corner has consequences everywhere. Poverty in one place relates to over-consumption in another. But the conventional and pro-NATO perspective sees us fitting into a humble place within a set hierarchy and playing our junior part in the club of the western powers.

Freedom

The autonomy we desperately need is the freedom to leave behind that conventional mind-set and to be ready to relate to other states on the basis of equality.

That autonomy will also be essential for building a fair and equal society free from outside pressures.

Meanwhile, what looks like a new Cold War is in the offing. Showing a good deal of contempt for German wishes NATO has insisted that its strategic nukes are to stay there and be upgraded. The missile defence plans for Europe are being rolled out.

Over in South Korea a natural paradise on the island of Jeju is being blasted to make way for a huge new naval base, ostensibly Korean but actually to host the US Aegis destroyers on which the missile defence apparatus will be deployed. At this time the last thing we want is to be aligned to any one of the big battalions.

It will all demand courage and imagination. I can't put it better than the SNP's own CND group: "Scotland should not sneak timidly onto the world stage, afraid of our own shadow. We should have the confidence to be brave and to project ourselves as a modern nation, with visions which are rooted in our concern for humanity."

union leaders need to paint a vision of an alternative worth fighting for. Why else would workers face their employers' wrath and lose pay to strike for a mere change of party label on the Prime Minister's lapel? Why would workers want continued low pay, appalling lack of protection at work, and the most vicious anti-union laws in western Europe, just so long as Labour imposed these instead of the Twin Tories?

That's where the fight for a fairer and decent society, a fundamental shift in power and wealth in favour of the working class, intertwines with the fight for Scottish independence.

Some union leaders need to stop kidding themselves they can convert Labour back to a socialist path. Each union and the STUC need to champion the demands for a Scotland where anti-union laws are scrapped and a positive charter of workers' rights introduced; where a £9-an-hour minimum wage is guaranteed to all over 16; where benefits and pensions are boosted by an immediate £50-a-week and a living grant for all students introduced, as a steps towards eliminating poverty.

Demands

They need to spearhead demands for taxation of the very rich and big business, and democratic public ownership and control of the centres of wealth creation and distribution, like the banks, energy, construction, big industries and landed estates. But not a single one of those measures is possible under devolution. All require the powers that go with full independence.

And likewise, if those marching for independence are to persuade a majority of the Scottish working class to vote for independence, they need to convince them it would mean workers will be better off. That is in no way guaranteed if Scotland's future is left in the hands of the SNP leadership, who are rattling the begging bowl under the noses of multinationals, seeking inward investment with promises of rock-bottom Corporation Tax... and more of the same as

British capitalism offers. That's no vision to inspire workers to vote Yes in 2014!

The SSP is campaigning in the unions, workplaces and communities for independence to have the powers to change society - but for socialist independence, so that the working class enjoy the benefits of those changes, and in fact carry them out. We believe this to be a far more realistic prospect than waiting for Labour to go through a seismic conversion to the aims of the trade unions and socialism.

And far from dividing the working class of Scotland from those in England, Wales or indeed beyond this little island, strides in the direction of socialism in Scotland would encourage and inspire workers elsewhere to follow suit.

Internationalism

The solidarity and internationalism of the best of the Scottish working class has never depended on rule by London-based capitalist governments - which have in fact always sought to divide and rule working people.

It is blatantly obvious - as Labour's 'Better Together' (with the Tories) brigade hypocritically trot out as an argument against independence - that Scottish workers have far more in common with workers in Liverpool, London or Birmingham than with Scottish landowners or bankers.

But that also applies to our common interests with workers in the South of Ireland or Australia or the United States. But does anybody in their right mind dare argue that those countries need to come back under British rule before we can have class unity between their workers and those in Scotland?!

International shop stewards' committees, alongside full Scottish autonomy within union structures, would both be an extension of union democracy and an enhancement of unity in action against our common enemies.

The fight for an independent socialist Scotland is a vital part of the international struggle against capitalist exploitation - not some kind of diversion from it.

Chalk Farm: a riot of our own

Theatre review: *Chalk Farm* by Kieran Hurley and Julia Taudevin, directed by Liz Carruthers, featuring Sean Brown and Julia Taudevin. Presented at Oran Mor, Glasgow, as part of 'A Play, A Pie And A Pint' until 22 September

by Sandra Webster

SOMETIMES it seems to me as a nation that there are two different stories being narrated.

The commentary and ideology of those in the power and the stories of everyday people caught up in events that are outside their influence.

In *Chalk Farm* the writers Kieran Hurley and Julia Taudevin use the metaphor of a mother and her son to give voices to those who are not usually listened to.

Maggie and her son Jamie live in the high rises of the Chalk Farm Estate.

Maggie promises her young son when they move in this will be a place of safety but as he gets older and looks to find his place in the world she can no longer protect him from the dangers outside.

From their flat they describe seeing 7/7 unfold in the city below them where the young



BOYS WILL BE BOYS: what harm is Jamie to anybody - a boy with a Batman lunch box?

7-year-old Sean believes he can protect the city.

Seven years later in the London Riots, he finds himself caught up with his friends on the streets below. Mirroring a society that no longer have conversations with each other.

Maggie and Jamie living under one roof tell their stories with moving and sometimes funny soliloquies of their lives together and apart as a teenage son and mother.

Sean Brown a student of The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland brought vulnerability

and energy to the role of Jamie.

The delivery of his dialogue was poetic reminding me of the artist Tricky and captured how any young person could get caught up in the riots.

He engaged the audience and was the narrator of the crowd. In many ways he personified the crowd.

Julia Taudevin as his mother Maggie told her story while calmly making a cheese and pickle sandwich for her "pickle" in a *Batman* sandwich box, her last link to the promises she had made to her son that they would be safe there.

Her excellent portrayal of a middle aged mum was real and emotional as she reflected her own role as the many mothers demonised by the government after the riots by Cameron's government.

The joint writing by Hurley and Taudevin who are also real life partners was fluid and flawless.

Kieran Hurley when talking about the writing said that they had worked together

well, bouncing ideas and words off one another writing different aspect of each character.

It was impossible to see which were each of the individual's writers words.

Chalk Farm is an important piece of theatre about the causes of the riots from a different perspective.

It is easy for the government to demonise those involved as the cause rather than looking at the causes.

One piece of dialogue from the play criticises Ed Milliband for claiming that he used to walk to school near the area while having no understanding of the community.

The play as well as telling us the story of some of those caught up in the riots also presents the voices of those whose property was destroyed in a well balanced way.

A beautiful piece of theatre which could be a piece of forum theatre and be used for education. However, I hope will be shown again soon.



PLAY FOR TODAY: communication difficulties between a teenager and his mum is a metaphor about how we as a nation don't interact

Independence support is growing in Catalonia

by Bill Bonnar

ON Tuesday 11 September, Barcelona became a sea of red and white Catalan flags as around two million people demonstrated in support of independence under the slogan 'Catalonia – A New European State'.

Catalonia's National Day - 11 September - has witnessed similar mass demonstration in the past. What made this demonstration different were opinion polls which currently show between 40 per cent and 50 per cent in support of independence.

This is significant for a particular reason. It has long been established that a clear majority of native Catalans support independence but this is a region of Spain where 40 per cent of the population are Spanish and another 14 per cent from other parts of the EU.

This has long been taken as the guarantee that Catalan independence could not be won in a referendum because it had little or no support among non-Catalans.

Support doubled

However, support for independence among all the peoples of Catalonia is now double what it was a couple of years ago and seems to be rising with every poll and for the first time is attracting support from significant sections of the non-Catalan population.

The reasons for this are not difficult to find. Spain is the midst of its worst economic crisis since the 1930s. The country was particularly badly hit by the banking collapse of 2008 which among other things led to a collapse in Spain's grossly inflated property market.

Unemployment is currently running at around 25 per cent - almost certainly an underestimate, with youth unemployment considerably higher. All social and economic indicators show a country mired in a multi-layers crisis which is, in turn, producing a political crisis at all levels of society.

Mass struggles against the government's austerity programme are growing daily. This has been mirrored in Catalonia itself.

Catalonia has long been seen as one of the economically stronger regions of Spain



CATALONIA: although more than half the region's population is made up of non-Catalans, opinion polls show that support for independence is currently at 40-50 per cent

and a significant net contributor to the Spanish economy and exchequer.

Despite this, Catalonia's regional government recently had to go cap in hand to the government in Madrid for a €6 billion bailout; a move which further undermined the case for staying within a united Spain.

Within this mass movement for independence the left is playing a significant role both in terms of building broad support for independence but also in developing a picture of what a future independent Catalonia would look like.

This includes Catalonia becoming a republic, developing sustainable economic growth, protecting the environment, pursuing policies which reduce poverty and inequality and aligning the new country in support of progressive social causes around the world.

The main party of the left are Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia).

The programme of the party is summed up within the name. It a party which has developed a left of centre social and economic programme, wants to see the establishment of a republic and envisages a future independent Catalonia comprising the existing region plus neighbouring Valencian province, the Balearic Islands and Occident; a province currently in France.

Its origins are as one of the partners in the Republican Government during the Spanish Civil War and brutally suppressed during the Franco dictatorship before re-emerging in the mid-1970s. With about 8 per cent of the vote in the last general election; it has strong representation in regional and local government.

Two years ago a conference was held in Barcelona under the title 'The Struggle for Socialism in Nations without a State'. It brought together left independence movements from across Europe including from Catalonia and the Basque Country.

The Scottish Socialist Party was represented by this writer. What was significant was the broad agreement that independence cannot be seen as an end in itself but rather as a means to a better kind of society.

Twin strategy

For this the left must embrace a twin strategy; of supporting the overall movement for independence while bringing socialist politics into that movement.

Current struggles in Catalonia, the Basque Country and here in Scotland show that events have moved on considerably since that conference.

These struggles are producing a unique opportunity for the left - one that it must grasp with both hands.

Universal Credit does not mean access for all

by Sandra Webster

DESPITE growing concerns from over 70 charities, the government are still determined to carry on and begin to introduce the new Universal Credit benefit from October 2013.

They remain confident that all claimants will be in receipt of this in 2017. This will replace five existing benefits and will be paid monthly instead of the usual fortnightly payments that those who claim benefits are used to.

The Local Government Association has been sceptical on whether the new IT systems will be ready in time, and on the security of the system itself, with very confidential information having to be submitted online.

Vulnerable

Those in receipt of benefits will for the first time have to claim online using their own internet access or at a local centre such as a library or community centre.

The Citizen Advice Bureau estimates that 8.5 million people have never used the internet, with a further 14.5 million people having very rudimentary IT skills.

Again, like many other policies of this government, this will have a big impact on the most vulnerable in our society, especially the elderly and those who can't afford computer access.

Ann Begg MP mentioned in her own evidence that she



IAN DUNCAN SMITH: his benefit reforms will harm the vulnerable

could not find a broadband package that would cost her less than £30 a month to install in her own flat.

The government claim this new system will replace and simplify the current system and will also save money. The unions have growing concerns on the impact on civil servant jobs, as more and more work is computerised.

How universal will this benefit be? For many groups interested in a fairer equal society the payment of the benefit will impact on the progress that has been made towards equality.

Fran Bennet of The

Women's Budget Group indicates this will have a more disproportionate affect on women in a two-parent family. At present, the benefits paid to a family are usually paid out to both partners but the Universal Credit will be paid out to one designated person.

She fears that this may reinforce the stereotype of the "male breadwinner" and one person having financial power may lead to power inequalities in relationships.

Women may also be more greatly affected, as they usually manage the budget in the household. As well as

those in receipt of benefits, many people in work may receive their wages weekly or fortnightly.

People on lower incomes are more likely to make more smaller purchases for food and fuel. The new monthly benefit will be difficult for some people to manage.

It must be recognised that those who get by on £60-a-week are not just good but magnificent budgeters but the concern is that at the end of the month with no access to overdrafts, how people will manage with dwindling food and money for fuel.

Evidence shows that it is women who will go without first so the rest of their family can have some food.

Sinking ship

In last week's cabinet reshuffle, Iain Duncan Smith refused to move from his post. He said he wanted to see through the benefit reforms that he has been one of the architects of.

Like the captain of a sinking ship, he will see through the dismantling of the Welfare State which has served all of us well for over 64 years.

The current benefit system has protected the vulnerable and has supported those in need. It was a Conservative government that brought in Disability Allowance. Universal Credit will certainly not be universal.

Again, many, including the most vulnerable, will be left behind.